

to put forward. It's probably just fuss, but, as she seems a person of influence, the Yard has to take notice."

Now this was strangely unlike the Sir Thomas Ladman that Leigh knew, to whom the poorest had just as much right to protection and courtesy as the greatest in the land; but, then, the Chief had been strange ever since his return.

Leigh took his orders, therefore, and prepared to carry them out, irrespective of his own views on the subject.

His views on the Chippendale case had cost him the Chief's confidence; if he could regain that confidence it might enable him to state his views on the larger issue with greater cogency.

The only thing Leigh did not like about the order was that it appeared, as he thought, to be taking him away from any hope of being of use to Grace Seaton—and Grace Seaton's face was continually before his mind as the taxi hurried the young detective towards the London house of Mrs. Cranley Watson, one of the stateliest of the old mansions in Porchester Square.

CHAPTER XII

A Strange Bank Robbery

MRS. CRANLEY WATSON'S house was all that an English town house could be.

It had been in the family for years, as the old pictures and the magnificent antiques testified. The rooms, too, were all period rooms, and everything was of the very best, regardless of cost, pointing to an ancestry of taste equal to their birth.

Yet Mrs. Cranley Watson seemed as foreign to her surroundings as an American pork-butcher in a moated grange—which was the first thing that struck Leigh as he was ushered into her salon.

"Oh, are you the man from the Yard?" she said, looking at him through her lorgnette. And she looked surprised that Leigh's tailor had not broadcast the fact sartorially.

"Sir Thomas Ladman has asked me to call on you," said Leigh, with a dignity in every way equal to that of the Society explorer. "Perhaps you will be good enough to say in what way we can be of use."

"Well," continued her untitled ladyship, "it's not so much upon my own account, as for my great friend Prince Grika. You know, the famous Balkan family——"

"And I understand," broke in Leigh, "that you want special precautions."

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**THE SIEGE OF
SCOTLAND YARD**

THE SIEGE OF SCOTLAND YARD

SUPPOSE a master criminal, head and centre of a great gang of international crooks, could impersonate and change places with the head of Scotland Yard! This is the daring idea at the back of Mr. Redmond Howard's original and exciting story. Sir Thomas Ladman, the head of Scotland Yard, is kidnapped, and carefully hidden away. But apparently he is at his post as usual: and just at the time when the mysterious and motiveless death of a rich financier's wife is under investigation. The pseudo Sir Thomas's first anxiety is to get hold of a list, in the real Sir Thomas's possession, of the principal members of his gang with their records; that anxiety is his undoing. His ignorance of the things he ought to know arouses the suspicion of his double's assistant, who cleverly makes the impersonator give himself away. After that discovery the excitement of the duel between the two never flags for a moment, until the final defeat of the master villain brings with it the solution of other mysteries which help to make "The Siege of Scotland Yard" a tantalising and engrossing story.

THE SIEGE OF SCOTLAND YARD

BY
L. G. REDMOND HOWARD

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CHAPTER I

The Most Perfect Machine in the World

SIR THOMAS LADMAN had reached the climax of his career as Chief Commissioner of Police, and he would leave Scotland Yard the most perfect machine for the detection of criminals ever devised.

Yet, as he looked out from his window at Big Ben towering up majestically against the stormy sky, symbolising the constitution which "policed half the world for peace," he felt no regret that he had not devoted his life to politics, where, by common consent, his brilliant talents would long ago have raised him to Cabinet rank.

Had not the Prime Minister himself, upon the occasion of receiving his knighthood, paid him the graceful compliment of saying that his was the more important of the two positions?

"We politicians," the Premier had said, "only make the laws: you make them obeyed"; and the tribute, as the Press observed, was in no sense an exaggeration.

Ladman was Scotland Yard, and Scotland Yard Ladman—a name which had become to the world of crooks what the name of Attila—Scourge of God—had once been to Europe, when the avenging Goths had swept down upon pagan Rome.

Never had England been so free from crime: for

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the vengeance of the Law had become almost automatic, thanks to his methods of keeping track of every suspect, whose features, finger-prints, record, and habits were all docketed and indexed even before temptation assailed him.

As to the few Continental criminals whom international agreement and conventions still allowed to remain in England—they felt as if they were being watched day and night by some giant tigress guarding her young. Such plots as they hatched were not for perpetration in England, whose hospitality they respected in order to save their own skins. But now even this privilege was going to be taken from them.

The aim of persistent pressure upon his part—Sir Thomas Ladman had at last persuaded the authorities to bring the matter of “asylum” before the League of Nations, and there was every hope of habitual criminals being placed beyond the pale of civilisation as ruthlessly as modern hygiene eradicates disease.

This would be his crowning victory, and, to that end, like some chemist in his laboratory, he had accumulated vast stores of information about nearly every criminal in the world—all safely lodged in cipher in the vaults of Scotland Yard, and ready for an international campaign in the interests of justice and security. These had been gathered from all the ends of the earth, at considerable expense, and in some cases at the cost of precious lives, and the Chief knew that his final move would not take place without a desperate struggle, and that as the time drew nigh the danger must of necessity increase.

It was still a battle of brain and courage—possibly, on their side, of desperation—and it was to meet this

contingency that he had made discipline within the force the keynote of the machine.

That Sir Thomas Ladman had never married was not for lack of love, for to know the man was to love him. It was rather that, like all great lovers, he could love but once, and he had given his love to England. A student of crime, even before his Sandhurst days, he remembered the quiet, gentle reader who had sat beside him for a week in the British Museum—feeding the pigeons at luncheon time, when he went without himself—had he not deluged a continent in blood?

This incident alone had taught him the greatest lesson of his life—namely, that an idea inside a brain can be as much a menace to civilisation as a single germ of plague in a single body can be to humanity, and he had sworn within his inmost soul that he would make England safe, and, through England's example, the world.

His ambition was to be known to the police as the "Lister" of Crime, the inventor of social antiseptics—be the risk what it might!

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Suddenly the Chief turned from the contemplation of Westminster as if awakening from a reverie—the Yard knew the mood well, the quick, sharp decision that usually prefaced an order leading to victory.

He made his way across his room and selected one of the score of switches that connected his desk with every department in the building ("the brain-box," as they called it), but, even as he pressed the button with his usual determination, the furrows of

anxiety were still ploughing their way across his brow.

The frown, however, turned immediately to a smile as the door opened and there stepped forward, instead of the heavy figure of the old-type official, the athletic form of a young 'Varsity man.

It was one of the new touches at the Yard : graduates who had served in blue through the ranks before going on to higher duties, as well as getting their blues at Oxford and Cambridge.

Dandy Leigh, in fact, might have sat for a Savile Row fashion-plate, so that the soubriquet " Dandy " was not without point.

" A gentleman to his finger-tips, even when he is arresting of yer," as an old lag put it.

" Well, Chief, one more round with your sparring partner before going into the ring," said the young inspector, for Sir Thomas Ladman was not averse to a certain tone of humour being introduced into the daily routine by those he had picked out as much for their personal qualities as their professional capacities.

" Oh, I'm feeling quite fit," said Ladman, " and I think I can meet blow for blow—but it's no good letting one's training be watched, so I propose, just for the next few days, taking a holiday."

Leigh looked puzzled ; the Chief had never before used the word.

" What do you mean, sir ? Not feeling run down, I hope ? "

" No ; but I think it may be useful to put the enemy off the scent, so as to let them show their hands while I'm away. It will be the last chance

they will have, so there may be some lively work. Are you prepared? "

Dandy Leigh, upon whose shoulders a certain amount of responsibility would fall in the Chief's absence, smiled.

"I'll order a complete new kit for the occasion," he said lightly. "The cleanest linen for the dirtiest work——" But, noticing that Sir Thomas Ladman was more than usually serious, he stopped his persiflage.

"Leigh," said the Chief, "the next month means everything to the Yard, and the Yard means everything to the world. We must win, but the men we are fighting are not the rank and file, but their picked chiefs, and they will stop at nothing."

The younger man looked at his Chief full in the face, and scanned the chiselled countenance with its strong mouth and steady brows, surmounting with fitting dignity the perfectly poised frame of the Commissioner.

The Chief liked men who could stand well. Feet were to him what noses were to Napoleon—an indication of character, as they are of power in a racehorse; he had fine feet himself, giving shape to, instead of merely being encased by boots—and, by a strange coincidence, almost exactly the same fit as Leigh.

So there was a touch of his old self when Ladman said: "Well, I want you to step into my shoes till I return—in other words, I'm putting you in charge. You know my plans and my policy better than any of the others at the Yard——" Then he added, with the touch of the friendship which had sprung up between them: "Who knows? You may have to carry on where I leave off, some day."

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The compliment sent a thrill of gratitude through Leigh's blood, but one not altogether unmixed with anxiety.

"I think, sir," he replied, returning the compliment gratefully, "that you have made the Yard so perfect that it could not let anyone down; but, if it calls for anything more, I hope it will find me prepared to put every ounce of brain and muscle into the work."

"Thanks, Leigh," said the Chief. "Good-bye." And the two shook hands in silence. But, just as he turned to go, the younger man's eyes rested upon the calendar which lay upon the Chief's desk, and he could not resist asking a favour.

"Rather a red letter day for me, sir," he said. "I wonder if I might tear off the date just as a keepsake?"

"Oh, certainly," said Sir Thomas Ladman.

It was one of those "Memory" calendars, recalling historical events as they cropped up day by day, and, as Leigh tore off the sheet, he read the words: "Anniversary of the Loss of the *Titanic*."

CHAPTER II

A Congress of Crooks

NOT since before the war had La Mère Poussain found her little den in the Montmartre so crowded. It was like old times at the Café de la Liberté, except that all the faces seemed older and the features more steeped in vice.

There were scars of battle, too, and an empty coat-sleeve or two—yet no breast bore the ribbons of warfare.

Mère Poussain had given husband and brother and son, like many other French women, and her sacrifice gave her a certain peace of heart. Her clients only seemed to find it in wine and women and crime.

What brought them back again to her café she wondered; for every evening more boon companions arrived, strangers at first, then, within an hour or two, all strangely organised as if by some common code among them, uniting everyone in self-defence.

Yes, self-defence was the right word, for she had noticed a strange solidarity in their attitude whenever the door into the street opened rather too suddenly. But they seemed capable of taking the offensive, too, from the strange toasts they would drink to each other, with significant looks.

The Teutonic element referred to it as "*Die Nacht*";

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the Slav element spoke of "The Dawn"; the cosmopolitan element spoke of "Gold"; while one or two who spoke in broken English referred to it as "Zero" hour in derisive memory of military days.

As to the women—poles apart, no doubt, in the outer world—they seemed to be separated by no social distinctions at the café, but were all the slaves either of their own passions or their own poverty, lured on by some distant but hidden hope.

It was the underworld of crime—not the underworld of pleasure: the focus of life's dreaddest realities—not the centre of life's sweetest oblivions.

But it had all come about so suddenly and was all so mysterious that old Mère Poussain, whose cup of sorrow had been filled to overflowing, made sure it was an answer to her first prayers since the war.

.

"*Alors*, La Mère Poussain. More wine," came the harsh command of one bully of gigantic strength, "and Veuve Cliquot, mind—none of your imitations."

Mère Poussain looked from him to a smaller, but no less ruffianly, companion, as if to say: "You have not settled for the last round."

She put out her hand, and he at first made pretence of spitting into her open palm, with the words: "Cash that—it's my cheque on the bank of the future."

"*Salot*," hissed the old woman, quickly withdrawing her hand and hastening to carry out his order, with a shrug of the shoulders.

After all, whatever bad debts were incurred by the fraternity were always settled in the morning by the unknown individual who seemed to be their leader, on condition she kept her place select from respectable

bourgeois and curious sightseers. And she was too much of a business woman to inquire further. Satan himself had the reputation of paying up like a gentleman—so she let them get on with their devilry.

Like many of her class, she had only taken up vice in order to make enough money to retire early into virtuous respectability ; so every night she would say her Rosary, and tell the good God how difficult it was, since the war, to make ends meet within the limits allowed by the Ten Commandments.

For at heart she felt no enthusiasm for the vice she was compelled to tolerate, and the last words on her lips at night were invariably : "*Mais, mon Dieu, soyez pratique.*"

Only upon one thing, however, Mère Poussain refused to compromise. There must be no abuse of the English. After all, even if Providence had made them mad, Providence had also sent them to the relief of Paris. Her own *poilu* had died in the arms of *un de ces Tommies*, and from time to time she would sweep the sordid assembly with the proud contempt of a French woman, as if to say : "What the hell are they up to now—these damned foreigners?"

For days she had been worrying, but this last insult had made her more suspicious than ever, and she allowed herself to "listen in."

There was no mistaking the restless eyes and whispering lips of the two nearest the *comptoir*, and, as she saw the taller inhaling cocaine, she piously prayed that madness would soon be sent down to him from Heaven. As to the lesser, who preferred beer to the best French wines she stocked, and which she reverently said were

"fit for the Virgin herself," she had only one epithet, which she hissed under her breath.

"Bullet-head"—but one must be a French woman who had lived under "occupied" conditions to realise all it signified.

A third man came to their table.

"Well, *camarade*, how goes the Cause?" said the newcomer, with a slightly English accent.

"What cause can possibly flourish," came the guttural reply of the smaller man, "so long as the damned Englishman Ladman lives? Eh, *Mère Pous-sain*?" And he looked up as if to show that he was perfectly conscious of her eavesdropping.

Quick as lightning, the witty French woman took him up.

"What cause can flourish, *ma foi*! Why, *le football et le cricket*—that's all the English seem to want in the world."

"Bah! What use is that to democracy—to play games all one's life like schoolboys? That won't give us a living."

"Not quite such a danger as boys always playing with swords, even at school—sometimes they cut themselves."

The gibe at university duelling, and the fate it brought upon the very empire that encouraged it, went straight home.

In an instant the fellow had seized a heavy decanter, and, with the words "*Sale vache*" on his lips, would undoubtedly have brained the unfortunate woman had not the others held him from behind.

For a moment the place was a pandemonium of screams and curses, but an outsider would have noted

that the word "Police" was singularly absent, even from the lips of Madame Poussain.

It would have been different in London—but London had its Sir Thomas Ladman, which, incidentally, was not least among the reasons why a crook congress should have chosen Montmartre to plan their attack upon Scotland Yard.

Needless to say, caution soon put an end to their internal quarrels, but the incident had given conversation a very definite direction, and the German, now cool again, began to try and recall the old lessons in strategy which he had learnt in England before the war.

He began to think, and a phrase he had once written on the flyleaf of one of his text-books floated up before his imagination. "Strategy is character"—but the Slav could only think in terms of bombs and long red streams of blood which had flowed like rivers down the streets of Petrograd.

"How I hate these English with their sports! Oh, if I could only have ten thousand of my men, each with an aeroplane, and one hour over London on a dark night!" said Zitinoff, his eyes flashing with diabolical fury; but the Teuton, who went by the name of Estankraft, only smiled.

"You are wrong, friend," replied the latter. "Every bomb would only be like sowing dragons' teeth. Believe me, we tried it." Then, drawing his chair closer, he added: "It was the truth that stung in that woman's gibe. That's why I lost my temper. She was right. It is just their cricket that makes their national character, and in world power character is the height of strategy."

"Don't be a fool. I could kill you when you speak

By

like that ! ” said the other, but he had already learned, to his cost, that fury cannot take the place of logic, and he prepared to listen.

“ See,” continued Estankraft, “ in spite of our vow to do or to die together, even we are at each other’s throats. As to this mob we lead,” and he pointed to the groups round the café, “ Bah ! Every one a slave to his own vice or his own mistress—no slave can lead, just as no slave can rule.”

“ What do you mean ? ” said Zitinoff. “ Are not a man’s morals his own ? ”

The Teuton shook his head.

“ No, my friend, you cannot lead others until you can look in turn upon each man as an equal and, if need be, as a superior—and that’s what cricket teaches. It almost made me an Englishman.”

“ Why didn’t you become one ? ” said Zitinoff.

“ For the same reason, my friend, that you and all of us cannot—because we cannot ‘ play the game.’ ”

“ I’m sure I’m not anxious to—just hitting a little ball with a stick while twenty thousand look upon you as a hero,” said Zitinoff. But Estankraft would not be put off.

“ You know what I mean—not literally, but symbolically. We cannot keep the rules of society ; we cheat, we steal, we kill, if need be, to attain our ends, and then fail, when the same skill—nay, half the skill—would have seen us rise in honour to the top of our professions, instead of being as we are now—outcasts in every country, and to-morrow, perhaps, without any country——”

“ You mean,” said the other, without any of the old bravado, “ that Sir Thomas Ladman will succeed

because of his character?" And cold beads of perspiration began to gather on his brow.

"I do not say he will—I only say, if he does we are lost. Sir Thomas Ladman, like a great umpire in a land of sport, has got a complete record, not only of the cheats in the game of life, but of their friends, with the result that England is now almost free from crime."

"Well, all the better."

"Not so, *camarade*, for the rest of the world is beginning to see that it pays to anticipate crime, and, while we were plotting in fancied security in England, Ladman was watching us like a doctor examining the germs of disease, and now his report, all in cipher, lies in the vaults of Scotland Yard, ready to promulgate to every police system in the world, and, once that is done, we are finished."

"Then all I say is, let's force some of our slaves to burn the place down, or blow it up."

"And what use would that be if we cannot learn who were the compilers, who the watchers who followed our movements—who, in other words, were our real friends, if friends we have, and who are our foes."

There was a tense silence at the little table, broken only by a few half-muttered curses, which sounded like music to the ears of La Mère Poussain, for it meant that the good God was spoiling their plans.

"This man Ladman—tell me," said Zitinoff, "has he no wife, no child? We could threaten; it is often more powerful than death." But the other shook his head, and continued:

"Even his death would not bring us relief. His work would go on. That Scotland Yard of his! And

if he were suddenly killed it would be the one thing that would ensure his victory after death—his prestige is so great.”

“Then is there nothing that can be done? Are we to be exterminated like so many rats? By God! Surely he has a secret vice by which we can discredit him?”

It was a typical crook outlook to strike deeper than at a man's body—and into his very soul, for the soul of a man is his honour.

If they could once succeed in divesting Ladman of his good name—— Bah! Who would mind him then in the living death that was left him? But Sir Thomas Ladman was above even suspicion, and they knew it, and that is why they hated him—the man without a vice.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before there occurred one of the strangest coincidences the speakers had ever witnessed.

The first thing that drew their attention to anything unusual about their hidden den was a strange growing silence that seemed to be breaking in over the assembly.

The two speakers did not mind at first: it was a welcome relief after the row. But as the stillness grew from table to table, and the familiar “Hush!” of warning went from lip to lip, their ever-present instinct of dread was aroused.

“What the devil is up now, I wonder?” said Zitinoff.

As he spoke a hunchback—the man whom they usually employed to look at strangers first before admitting them—sidled up to him.

"An outsider has pushed his way in, sir. I could not stop him. There were police outside. He seems very drunk, and threatened to make a row. So I thought it best to be cautious, but I think it's all right. He's with little Zika. A bad lot, but well known to many of us."

Zitinoff uttered a curse. He looked angrily towards La Mère Poussain. Was this the way she kept her bargains?

Mère Poussain shrugged her shoulders. She did not know who he was, anyhow; as she put it: "The gentleman is as drunk as a live eel"—a graphic expression with a touch of disarming humour about it.

The humour, however, seemed lost upon the rest of the gathering, for one could hear the grating of chairs as couple after couple got up to go.

The fellow in question, in full evening dress, had his back towards the two crooks, his head swaying from side to side, his brain obviously under the influence of alcohol, and in vain trying to follow the jabbering of the demi-mondaine.

Then suddenly a table with all its contents crashed to the floor, as one group, more eager than the rest, made a bolt for the door.

"Damned fools! and their panic always gives us away. What are they frightened of now?" This from Estankraft, and he turned round to get a better view.

He only caught a side glance of the profile. It was more than enough. His face came over white.

"Good heavens! It can't be! It's impossible! Look! Tell me, what do you make of it?"

There came a wink from the demi-mondaine—the

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wink of the professional decoy ; but they gave back no countersign. They were too busy watching the stampede, for no other word could now describe the hurried exit of the braves, some of whom muffled up their faces in their coats so as to cover their faces from the drunkard.

" Damn Zika for a fool—if she's not a traitress—*that* man can't be drunk ! "

There was a wealth of meaning in the phrase that went deeper than words, for, as the two approached the swaying figure, there rose before their minds the familiar features of Sir Thomas Ladman.

They looked again. The man's eyes closed in stupor. Little Zika, undeterred by the scowl of the two men, pulled him towards her.

" Come on, dearie, kiss me—kiss little Zika."

The man made an effort to rise, but staggered and almost fell. As he did so, Zitinoff caught the glassy look in the man's eyes, with the unmistakable sign of alcohol, and he broke into a chuckle of glee, and exclaimed : " Ladman—drunk ! "

Feature for feature, measure for measure, down to the very last detail ; there could be no mistake.

The crooks' courage came back to them all of a sudden. They gave the girl the familiar sign : " Go on, we follow," and then allowed the two to depart, while they themselves prepared to follow at a safe distance.

Did little Zika know whom she had there ?

What matter ? Her friendship was enough to damn any man seen with her : publicity would do the rest.

The two crooks went back to the *comptoir*, where the mystified Mère Poussain stood, wondering what was happening that the brotherhood seemed suddenly to depart at that early hour.

"Come, friend, the Lord has delivered our enemy into our hands," said Zitinoff, with mock piety which shocked La Mère Poussain, who overheard the remark.

"As if the good Lord would deliver anybody but the Devil himself into the hands of such crooks," she muttered to herself—and she was right!

Yet had she been able to follow little Zika, and the men who shadowed her, down through the dark streets and through the still darker stairs up to the attic bedroom of a very she-devil of a woman, and witness the comparison that was being made between the photograph of Sir Thomas Ladman and the features of the drunken sot who lay stretched upon the dirty straw mattress—she could not, any more than they, have told the difference.

They could hardly believe their eyes. It was too good to be true.

"Keep him there, little Zika. Drug! Stun! Kill, if need be, but keep him there. You understand? Or the penalty of the brotherhood."

There was a savagery in their threat which struck terror into her heart.

She had heard that threat before—not to herself, but to a dear friend. It was as inexorable as a law of the Medes and Persians, and never repeated.

"*Mais, oui*. I keep him here. Very nice English gentlemen—only very unhappy. So I love him—he do anything for little Zika."

The two men shot a significant look at each other,

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then Zitinoff whispered: "There are only two possibilities, friend. Either it is Sir Thomas Ladman himself or it's the most perfect double of him God ever made—but, in any case, we win."

"How do we win?"

"Wait till we get outside," said the other, then, turning to little Zika, he added just one word, "Remember," and she nodded, trembling.

As soon as they were out in the street again, Zitinoff unbosomed himself.

"Listen. Ladman, they say, is going, or, for all I know, may have gone, on holiday. A 'phone through to London will let me know by the morning. If it is Ladman, you must claim Zika is your wife, and have him arrested, seeing that some photographers catch his features."

"Yes," replied the other, "but suppose it is not?"

The first speaker rubbed his hands with glee.

"You fool!" he said. "Why, if Ladman is still in London, and we can get this man over to England, to do our bidding, with such features, such a perfect double——" But just then two "agents" who had been watching them moved up in their direction, and they thought it better to separate.

Within the next twenty-four hours the plot was already maturing in England.

CHAPTER III

Murder

CHIPPENDALE MANOR had just been taken over by new owners—the Heathfields.

Vernon Heathfield, city financier, according to reports, was a millionaire. Hence, probably, his marriage to Lady Linder, a woman past middle age. On the one side money, and on the other a helping hand into that social position so prized by the self-made man.

On the second day following Sir Thomas Ladman's interview with his Chief Inspector at Scotland Yard, Vernon Heathfield was giving a little luncheon to a small party of business friends.

The hour for lunch had passed, and Mrs. Heathfield had so far not put in an appearance. Heathfield offered as an excuse that his wife had not been feeling very well for the past few days and was probably taking longer than usual to dress. "However," and he had laughed, "the delay should be an excuse for another cocktail."

One of his guests suggested telephoning for a doctor, but Heathfield had assured him that it was not necessary.

"And, even if it were," he had gone on to explain, "I couldn't telephone, for we are not connected in this house. As a matter of fact, it was one of the conditions

of the lease that I should not have the telephone installed. Annoying—yes—but, there, I wanted the place and so I agreed.” And then he rather hurriedly changed the conversation.

Another five minutes passed into nearly half an hour, and, in spite of his assurances, it became obvious that he was becoming anxious, and instinctively he apologised as he pulled out his watch and compared it with the timepiece.

“ Yet another, John,” he said, and his hand was actually clutching the familiar “ shaker,” when suddenly the air was rent with a piercing shriek.

“ Help, Vernon, help ! ”

Heathfield started like a man shot, the silver shaker crashing amidst the half-filled cocktail glasses, then for a moment or two he stood as if frozen.

The butler, too, seemed rooted to the spot, and the guests, not wishing to take the initiative, seemed to wait for a lead from their host.

Their host, deathly pale, seemed totally paralysed, his eyes half starting from their sockets like balls of fire.

Even before the company had time to recover, however, and Vernon Heathfield was normally in complete control of his nerves, once again the same cry rent the air—this time still more shrill and agonised.

“ Vernon, quick, Vernon ! ”

The first cry was so piercing that the echoes made it sound as if they had emerged from almost every room in the house. The second cry was unmistakably from the direction of the garden, and everyone in the room precipitated himself in the direction of the French windows opening on to the lawn.

They were locked, but the framework broke under the impact of their impatience.

A dense bank of rhododendrons hid the long avenue from their view; but it was obviously from this direction that the cries had emanated. This clump they had just begun to round when the most terrible cry that the human lips can utter pealed forth: "Murder!"

Another second, and they would be in time, possibly, for a rescue, but the same instant there was the sound of a huge thunder-like roar, drowning the cries, and by the time they had reached the spot they could only see a great volume of smoke issuing from the exhaust of a gigantic car, which was already disappearing in the distance.

"Stop him! Stop him!" came the agonised voice of the distracted millionaire; but everybody knew it would be out of the question to try and overtake such a car on foot.

The driver, scenting danger, was pressing his foot upon the accelerator and making the car leap like some living thing, billowing as it raced down one of the longest avenues in England.

Far away through the haze of the exhaust fumes, they could see the hesitation of the lodge gate-keeper.

There seemed momentarily still some chance of intercepting the fiend.

Oh! if only there had been a telephone—even from the house to the porter—it would have sufficed; and, before their very eyes, his guests could behold the unfortunate man tearing his hair under the spasms of his grief.

One of the servants, more athletic than the others,

had sufficient presence of mind to run down the avenue and wave frantically, crying "Gates!" But the fool of a fellow misunderstood the shout to be a command to open them—and the next instant it was too late.

With a screaming of the brakes sending up showers of sparks, as the iron-studded tyres gripped the ground, the car slowed up momentarily, but only for the fraction of a second necessary to swing out in a graceful curve before disappearing in a cloud of dust across the common which skirted Chippendale for miles around.

Often, in the days of the highwaymen, had these vast expanses been pointed out as national dangers, and only protection for rogues and vagabonds; but, with the coming of railways and telephones, the danger seemed to have passed, until the coming of the motor-car had once more revived the old peril—and this in spite even of the Flying Squad.

But never before had the danger been so brought before the eyes of the public as it was in the case of the Chippendale Murder Mystery, with which England was to ring for many a long day, and which was to put, not merely the Yard, but Sir Thomas Ladman to the severest test in his life.

For the same evening the body of Mrs. Heathfield was discovered, stabbed through the heart.

CHAPTER IV

Ladman to the Rescue

THE events that followed those narrated in the last chapter were some of the most baffling that had ever come before the notice of the Criminal Investigation Department since Ladman had been in charge of the Yard.

For sheer complexity, it might have been a direct challenge to the boasted perfection of the machine, and this was certainly the first impression it produced in Fleet Street. For not only had the murder of Mrs. Heathfield taken place, apparently under the very eyes of her own household, but every trace of her murderer seemed to have been covered up.

The isolated position occupied by Chippendale Manor was, of course, the obvious root of the tragedy, especially the absence of any telephones, which seemed inexplicable. This had necessitated a considerable delay before the local police, some five miles away, could be communicated with, and during this delay the culprit had been able to get a long start.

Then came the most mysterious part of it all—a circumstance which set the whole of England tingling with excited curiosity. For the body of Mrs. Heathfield was found the same evening *actually within the*

30 THE SIEGE OF SCOTLAND YARD

grounds, and only about fifty yards from the house itself.

This, moreover, although Heathfield's first precaution after the disappearance of the car whence emanated his wife's dying screams (which the whole household had been witness to) had been to have all the park gates closed.

Popular sympathy naturally went out spontaneously to the unfortunate man. A wave of indignation swept over the country, calling for vengeance, but Dandy Leigh felt it in a still more intimate way.

The reputation of Scotland Yard was in the balance ; the Chief's reputation—possibly his own.

It seemed the very irony of Fate that the incident had occurred just on the eve of Sir Thomas Ladman's well-earned rest ; but no one regretted his absence more than Vernon Heathfield.

Scotland Yard had, on several occasions, felt the benefits of the millionaire's munificence. Only a few years before a magnificent hostel had been presented and endowed by him for the benefit of the police force in their old age.

Hence the local police had a double incentive for trying to get the full credit of solving the great mystery, but it was not long before they found it beyond their powers and asked for help from the Yard.

At once the great machinery of the Yard was brought into action, as inquiries from the Sussex police, odd items of information, long lists of questions, and possible solutions began to pour in. The great files began yielding up their secrets, and the cross-index

system indicated new avenues of thought, but all these threads were not completing the network which should long ago have enmeshed smaller flies.

There could hardly be a question of motive: the woman had not an enemy in the world. The servants were all above suspicion, with good records—as it happened, selected by Harrods. The guests were also out of the picture. Three out of the four had only been back in England a few days, and were friends of Heathfield before his marriage; the fourth had never met him before.

Heathfield's public position and his absolute breakdown likewise protected him from suspicion.

But undoubtedly the most baffling thing of all the circumstantial evidence was the fact that the car used was actually one of those belonging to one of Heathfield's guests, which was recovered half-way to Bournemouth, while the body had been found late the same evening within the closed grounds amidst the shrubbery.

What had happened in the interval? Who was the accomplice? What the object of the crime?

To Leigh's mind, Mrs. Heathfield's murder at once sprang into that category known as complex in the sense of being a means to an end, rather than an end in itself; and he was longing to discuss it with the Chief. And, as the local police had been forced to call in help from the Yard, possibly the Chief would even change his mind about his holiday.

A sudden ring on the telephone and Dandy recognised with joy the voice of Sir Thomas Ladman.

"That you, Leigh?"

"Yes, sir," said Leigh.

"Ladman speaking. Listen. It's about the Heathfield case. I've just seen Heathfield. He's been a good friend to the Force, as he has been a good friend to thousands of other causes ; but he's nearly distracted with worry and begs of me to do all I can."

Dandy held his breath. If only it were his good fortune to be sent down on the case !

He listened eagerly, and the voice of Sir Thomas Ladman continued :

"I intend going down to Chippendale myself to-night—but to-morrow I want you to take over as from the Yard, and give the local men all the help you can."

"Certainly, sir. I expect you'll be there, won't you ? I'll come down first thing."

"Right you are, Leigh. I'm feeling a bit run down, but I must get this over. I shall have more to say when you come down." And, the order given, Leigh could hear the receiver replaced with the old determined click at the other end of the wire.

Meanwhile, however, the master brain that had brought criminal investigation almost to the level of one of the exact sciences was himself hurrying to the spot.

It was typical of the man to show his personal courtesy to Vernon Heathfield.

Murder, to use the words of a famous criminologist, is not a habit like other forms of crime, and can, accordingly, seldom be anticipated. It is an act of hot blood, in nine cases out of ten, not of cold deliberation ; but there were, certainly, circumstances accompanying the murder of Mrs. Heathfield which pointed to something more than a desire to kill.

There was the intention to pain, and also to mystify ; otherwise it would have been just as easy to have left the body with the car, dropped it by the wayside—in fact, done anything except what was done.

The only chance of clues that would have helped to elucidate the mystery had, unfortunately, been bungled—namely, the examination of the site where the body had been found. The ground had been literally trampled flat by the semi-hysterical members of Heathfield's own household long before the local police had been brought to examine it.

A sharp, but heavy shower, moreover, had washed the hilt of the dagger, which consequently showed no marks. In a word, the perpetrator of the crime had not only very successfully covered most of his tracks, but so far had also been singularly fortunate in having only third-class intelligences at his heels.

That was, in fact, one of the main reasons which had prompted Vernon Heathfield to make a direct appeal to Ladman, and Ladman's ready response.

Vernon Heathfield could hardly find words sufficient to express his gratitude to Sir Thomas Ladman upon his arrival at Chippendale Manor.

" My dear Sir Thomas," began the millionaire, " how can I thank you for this great courtesy upon your part in thus coming down in person ? "

" On the contrary, Mr. Heathfield," replied Ladman, " after your own many public benefactions, not to speak of those of poor Mrs. Heathfield, whom I used to meet in the old days as Lady Linder—it is the very least I can do."

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"But I have brought you back from your holidays," said Heathfield.

"I had not actually started," replied Ladman. "As a matter of fact, I was, as you know, at my place out Wimbledon way, looking over my papers, which I was getting in order before going abroad for a rest of about a month."

Vernon Heathfield gave orders for Sir Thomas Ladman's luggage to be taken to his room, and the two made their way to the exact spot in the lounge where Heathfield and his guests had been standing at the actual moment of the tragedy.

Sir Thomas Ladman, with one sweeping look around, took in the situation, the while the millionaire reconstructed the crime; but the Chief's mind seemed far away, although no single detail escaped him.

"All these things," he said at last, when Heathfield had finished, "are, I can assure you, already at the Yard, being investigated systematically, but I am afraid this is going to be no ordinary case, and, as I shall not be in town, I have selected one of the very best men in the Service—a young detective in whom I have the utmost confidence."

Heathfield made a deprecating gesture.

"Spare me more young men," said Heathfield. "My house has been literally occupied by a veritable army of 'brainlings,' my servants cross-examined, my place turned inside out, as if every single one of my household were under suspicion. Indeed, that has been one of the most compelling motives in my asking you to relieve me of this persecution."

The man was obviously still feeling the strain of the tragedy.

"These outlying places," said Sir Thomas Ladman, "are not without their danger to their occupants, and in such cases a cause of great anxiety to the police—but let me have the evening to think over it." Then, looking at Heathfield straight in the face, he said: "Have you any enemies, Mr. Heathfield? I mean, people who, in the course of your financial career—I will not say you have wronged—I know you are above suspicion—but who—what shall I say—well, might consider themselves wronged by you?"

"No," replied Vernon Heathfield. "I think, on the whole, I have tried to play the game with every man with whom I have come into contact, and, whatever advantages I have derived from my business successes I have not entirely kept to myself."

This was certainly true. Hardly a post but brought its batch of begging letters; hardly a hospital or institution but offered to name a new wing after him—if he would only help them—to the modest extent of *building* it.

"I have thousands of friends; and yet," added Vernon Heathfield, "I suppose there are few lonelier men in the world than myself. Rich men make few friends."

There was pathos in the millionaire's voice as he said this which moved Ladman to the depths of his soul; for, in addition to his great powers of intelligence, the Chief had a great big human heart. A millionaire with tears in his eyes—could anything be more moving?

"Then," added the Chief, "I hope, Mr. Heathfield, you will do me the honour of counting me among your friends, and I can give you my word that I shall leave

no stone unturned and spare no effort until the murderer of poor Mrs. Heathfield is brought to justice."

Heathfield seemed too moved to speak, and silently shook Sir Thomas Ladman's hand, while the latter continued :

"For twenty years I have been trying to make Scotland Yard the most perfect machine in the world : so perfect that other nations will copy our methods, and the peace we enjoy in England will spread over the whole earth—and now this comes——

"I tell you this, Mr. Heathfield—the murder of Mrs. Heathfield is not a crime—it is conspiracy ; in the morning I will say more, but not to-night."

The full magic of Chippendale Manor's solitude struck Sir Thomas Ladman with renewed force as his host, a silver candlestick in his hand, escorted the Chief Commissioner to his room upon one of the upper floors of the left wing.

The left wing was almost in the identical state in which the Elizabethan age had left it, for which reason the late Mrs. Heathfield had made it a stipulation, during the modernising of the old manor, that nothing whatever should be changed.

There was none of your imitation antique about it, and she would not even have radiators, electric light, or even coal—hence the silver candlestick, which, if the family traditions spoke true, had once been the possession of no less a person than Queen Elizabeth.

This Heathfield explained, adding : "I thought, as this is the first time I have had the pleasure of having you down here as my guest, Sir Thomas, that I would give you the honour of what, my dear wife told me,

was the state-room in the days when her ancestors entertained Royalty."

Sir Thomas Ladman bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"I quite agree, Mr. Heathfield. It would have been a sacrilege to modernise this"—for at that moment the millionaire threw open a handsome oak door, which revealed a beautiful room furnished in period style.

The host handed his guest the silver candlestick, adding: "There may be a slight smell from the preservative which we always employ since the death-watch beetle almost won its battle with Westminster Hall; but I do not think you will find it unpleasant, and, as a matter of fact, you'll find that in half an hour or so it goes right off, and you don't notice it any more."

Vernon Heathfield had been right. The smell, which was not unpleasant, faded as Sir Thomas Ladman's nose became accustomed to it. But as the Chief lay down in the great four-posted bed, with its depth of mattresses, he noticed it again; and now it was increasing in strength.

As he lay there in the darkness sniffing and trying to fathom the mystery which was beginning to arouse his suspicions he thought he would get up and investigate the matter further. To his horror, on trying to rise, he discovered that his muscles no longer responded to the call of his will.

With a supreme effort to overcome the lethargy that was assailing him he struggled into a sitting position.

As he did so he found himself seized by the arms and forced back again while a powerful pair of hands

groped their way to his face and placed a cloth sodden with chloroform over his nostrils.

As soon as this had been firmly fixed in position, another pair of arms dragged him from the bed into an upright position on the floor.

Even as this happened the room was flooded with light from a strange hole in the wall, which a few moments before had been an innocent-looking panel. In the secret doorway, for this is what it really was, stood the double of the unconscious man, appearing as though framed in a mirror.

It was no longer, however, the drunken sot of the boulevards, but a man with feature for feature, and look for look, as proud and as resolute as Sir Thomas Ladman himself and as sober.

As the Chief came to his senses and saw this figure before him he fancied he was dreaming, but the chloroformed cloth, which also acted as a gag, brought him back to stern reality.

For a few moments the two men stared into one another's eyes; then the pseudo Sir Thomas Ladman commenced to dress himself in the clothes which the other had just discarded, while the real Sir Thomas Ladman looked on in helpless anger and astonishment.

With a final contemptuous glance in the direction of the irate captive, the new Sir Thomas Ladman passed through the secret door leaving the former to darkness and despair.

CHAPTER V

The Woman in the Case

CATCHING the first train the next morning, Dandy Leigh heaved himself into a first-class carriage and sank down on the seat with a sigh. He had caught the train by a margin of seconds.

It was quite some time before he noticed, to his annoyance, that the carriage he had entered was a non-smoker, that he was smoking a cigar, and that there was a lady in the corner opposite him.

He let down the window and threw the cigar out, then turned to apologise :

" I beg your pardon. To tell you the truth, I was sure I was in a smoker."

The girl dropped the paper she was reading into her lap. Leigh observed that she was a beautiful girl—very young, barely out of her teens, and that she was dressed in mourning.

" Oh, please, why did you throw it away? " she smiled. " I really rather like the smell of a good cigar, and—it was a good one."

This compliment to Leigh's taste in cigars pleased him. He smiled, then at once became serious, for he saw that the girl had been crying.—Evidently crying behind that paper of hers.

" I see you are in mourning," he said, " and in deep distress. I hope it is no near relative."

Even with financial security, it would necessarily be an ordeal to one of Grace Seaton's temperament, and Dandy Leigh, as much from chivalry as professional reasons, determined to make full use of the coincidence which had thrown them together.

After all, it might be the only opportunity which he would have of getting at the inner soul of the stern millionaire who lived in a palace large enough to be a hotel.

Leigh therefore made his way downstairs in the direction of the huge lounge, with its beautiful carved staircase, and, as he walked on the heavy pile carpets, silent as the grave, he caught a glimpse of Grace Seaton.

She had changed her travelling dress for one of almost schoolgirl simplicity, and her hair fell like a cascade of molten gold over her neck—but he could not see her face. It was buried in her hands, and from the heaving of her shoulders, and the convulsive sobs that reached him, he could tell that the girl was on the verge of a breakdown.

He was almost up to her before she heard his footsteps. Then she started to her feet like a frightened thing.

"Oh, it's you! I beg your pardon," she said, "but I couldn't help it. Chippendale all looks so different now that Auntie is gone. It's like some huge, magnificent coffin, and it seems as if it was descending with me in it—you know, like a lift—into the bowels of the earth."

Was it instinct or just hysteria?

Leigh hastened to use what words of comfort came first to his lips, but he was careful to put them in the form of an interrogative.

"Come, come! Your Uncle will be back shortly. He will be delighted to see you, and I am sure he will do everything in his power to help you. Who knows what plans he has? Besides, you must think of your future." Then he added: "Don't you think it would be Mrs. Heathfield's dearest wish, if she were here, that you should follow the career for which she had sought you out?"

The point went home, and seemed to supply a new reason for struggling on, out of loyalty to the dear dead.

"Yes, you are right," she said, rising, and wiping the tears from her eyes. "I must be brave. I will be brave." And she added, with that wonderful look which a woman gives to the man in whom she first puts her trust: "You must help me."

Then Grace Seaton told him the full details of her great ambition, and what a lot the great professor had thought of her acting, and how he had begged that she might take the rôle of lead in the coming season of the New International Players who were coming to London.

Leigh pricked up his ears at this latter. He remembered how powerful influence had been brought to bear upon the Home Office in the matter of certain passports for a Central European troop of actors.

"So she is connected with these, is she?" Leigh thought to himself. "If so, the more I keep her in sight the better—if they are the same gang as I think they are." And the mind of the young detective went back in thought to the long line of files in Scotland Yard where certain finger-prints he knew of had only very lately come under the category of "art for art's sake."

"They all said," continued Grace Seaton, "that I

would be the making of Estankraft's plays, and that an Englishwoman ought to be in the cast to make it really international. But, at any rate, it's enough for me to know that Auntie would have wished it, and, as you say, I must be brave for her sake."

Just at that moment Leigh could hear the sound of a distant car rapidly coming up the avenue; in another minute their interview must end.

He leaned forward and came close to her.

"Please don't look upon me merely as a detective," he said, "and forgive me for saying what I am about to say, but I want you to promise me something."

An expression of gratitude spread like a ray of sunshine over her countenance.

"I promise. For I am sure Auntie would like me to promise. She often said that, if Uncle died, she did not know to which of his men friends she could appeal for me—if ever we wanted help."

"Then, if you are in any trouble, you will have no hesitation in appealing to me—no matter what it is, when, or how."

Then, with an old-world courtesy, Leigh, who in the Elizabethan setting of Chippendale felt like Sir Philip Sidney or Raleigh, picked up her hand and reverently pressed the tips of her fingers to his lips.

The very next moment the door was flung open, and Vernon Heathfield entered, livid with rage.

"How dare you take such liberties with my ward, whoever you are, sir, and how did you get in here? I gave strict instructions that nobody was to be admitted."

Dandy Leigh realised to the full the awkwardness of the situation, but before he could explain Grace Seaton came forward.

"I asked him," she said, with something in her voice that clearly indicated that, frail and fragile as she looked, she was capable of decision and strength.

"And what business had you to do so in my absence? Is this gentleman already known to you?"

"No," replied Grace Seaton monosyllabically.

Vernon Heathfield expected an explanation, and the explanation was indeed obvious, but its suppression, under the circumstances, clearly indicated that she was more than a child and claimed the right of discretion.

Dandy saw trouble ahead, and stepped forward, card in hand.

"Excuse me, Mr. Heathfield, but I am afraid I owe the courtesy of this interview entirely to my persistence."

Vernon Heathfield glared at him, and tore the card into fragments and threw it into the fire without deigning to look at it. There was no mistaking the insult, but it was as much an insult to his own ward as to Leigh, a stranger in his house.

"I think, in deference to your ward, you might have looked at my name," said Leigh, with supreme calm. "I am Inspector Leigh of Scotland Yard, and have come down at the special request of Sir Thomas Ladman, who telephoned me to meet him here, but who, I hear, left early this morning."

Vernon Heathfield saw his mistake, but not before that mistake had revealed a note in his character which he would obviously have preferred to suppress,

to judge from the hasty move he made to retrace his steps.

"Oh, a thousand pardons, my dear sir—a thousand apologies. Any friend of Sir Thomas Ladman is a friend of mine, and welcome as he was at Chippendale Manor—as welcome as my own niece." And Heathfield drew Gracie Seaton to his breast.

The simile was an unfortunate one, after what Leigh had himself witnessed of the latter's welcome, but it opened his eyes to the realisation that Grace Seaton was to play a larger part than he had anticipated in elucidating the mystery of Chippendale.

CHAPTER VI

The New Owner of Chippendale

WHATEVER faults Dandy Leigh may have had to find with his host upon their first meeting, he certainly had nothing to complain about upon the morrow.

Coming down a full quarter of an hour before breakfast, in order to cast a look over the ground, Leigh found Vernon Heathfield already awaiting him with an apology on his lips.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Leigh," said the millionaire, "that you really must forgive me about yesterday: at the same time, I am sure you will appreciate, I will not say my surprise, for I did not expect my niece back, but my indignation when I found her with you, whom I did not know——"

To anticipate any leading question Leigh broke in upon Vernon Heathfield:

"Please do not apologise. I quite understand. It is rather for me to make my excuses. Anything that may have seemed, upon my part, as taking a liberty you must put down to my desire to soothe one who, after all, is only a child—and a child with a sorrow."

"Yes, I understand, Mr. Leigh," said Heathfield. "I fear poor Grace will miss her aunt very much. For though, as you can well suppose, I will do everything in my power to take her place and launch the

girl upon her career on the stage, Grace Seaton is by no means the only one of my late wife's protégées. Hence it would be invidious upon my part to make any distinction between them."

The words sank into Dandy Leigh's heart as the millionaire uttered them ; but he made no comment, leaving Vernon Heathfield to expound his attitude at greater length.

"My late wife," continued Leigh's host, "was charity itself. But charity can be a curse sometimes instead of a blessing, and adoption, like sudden riches, is able to turn a child's head."

"Oh, but supposing you had a son," replied Leigh, "surely you would not take such an attitude? You would leave him your wealth and expect him to carry on your name and position in the same style to which you had accustomed him."

"Most certainly not!" replied the millionaire emphatically. "He would not have a penny. The money would all go, as I intend mine shall go, to the hospitals."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before Grace entered the room, and Heathfield, by way of emphasising his point, repeated himself :

"I was just saying, Grace, that you will have to put all your heart into your work so as to make a success and thus assure your future."

"Why, of course I will, Uncle," said the girl. "For, as Mr. Leigh was saying only yesterday, it would be Auntie's dearest wish if she were alive to-day. Besides, I *want* to be independent. You've already been too kind as it is."

The difference in the angle of vision was typical of

the girl, with her simple English outlook, but why had not the "generous" Heathfield taken the same point of view, or at least given his niece the credit for the nobler sentiment?

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During breakfast Leigh and Grace spoke of the modern theatre, its mission, its possibilities and needs, while Vernon Heathfield begged to be excused, and, as was his custom, went through his correspondence. As his host opened letter after letter, however, the detective could not help noticing a certain look of anxiety come over his face.

Had millionaires, then, cares, like the rest of mortals?

Leigh kept chattering on.

"I often go the theatre," he said. "I think it's the most educative recreation I know, and most useful too, from a professional point of view."

"I should hardly have credited a man from Scotland Yard with being interested in drama," said Grace. "Of course, abroad the theatre is ranked as having taken the place of the Church in the moulding of public opinion, and people go there as regularly as their fathers used to go to hear the sermons on a Sunday."

"Indeed?" said Leigh.

"Yes," continued Grace Seaton. "And that's what the old professor was always impressing upon us. The world of to-morrow is what the stage of to-day will make it."

Vernon Heathfield looked up from his correspondence.

"Then you look upon yourself as having a mission in life—a kind of vocation?" Leigh put in.

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"Oh, myself, no. The actor is, after all, only the mouthpiece of the dramatist. It is the dramatist who has the mission, or, rather, his work," said Grace.

"And what is this work of the international plays in which you are taking the leading rôle?" said Leigh, trying to get to the heart of the mystery of this young girl's association with a form of propaganda which had already come to the notice of Scotland Yard.

Before the girl could answer, however, Vernon Heathfield looked up and interrupted the conversation; Leigh thought deliberately.

"Oh, Grace, dear," he said, "there's a letter from Harcourt, your aunt's family solicitor, to say that he will be down this morning in order to read the will, and he asks whether you would be there."

"I?" said Grace, with surprise. "But why should I be there?"

"I can't quite make out myself, to tell you the truth," said the millionaire. But, as he said this, Leigh noted a decided look of great anxiety upon his face, stronger and more marked than that which had preceded it.

Heathfield looked fixedly at Leigh for a moment, and then said: "I have some private matters to discuss with my niece after breakfast, Mr. Leigh. Perhaps you could make it convenient to complete the investigations for which you are down here while we chat. We shall probably be engaged until lunch-time, when, perhaps, you might like to see Mr. Harcourt, the lawyer, though I do not see how he can throw any light upon the mystery."

Yet this was the very thing which the staid, precise old lawyer was destined to do.

For family solicitors, like father confessors, hold their professional secrets very sacredly, while looking through life's hypocrisies with the X-rays of truth.

Hence Mr. Harcourt, though he had himself drafted the will in compliance with the late Mrs. Heathfield's instructions, did not move an eyelid as, arriving from town shortly after eleven o'clock, he listened to the millionaire's plans for the future of Chippendale Manor and the career of Grace Seaton.

"I shall see, of course, that Grace will never want," Heathfield went on. "But she must make a profession of her career—while, as to Chippendale, I do not know how I shall be able to stand it without the one woman in the world who made it a home. In fact, I feel so broken up that I was considering giving it to the nation."

"Yes, yes. Ah, yes," said the lawyer. "And a very noble idea too—quite worthy of your well-known reputation for generosity, Mr. Heathfield." But the tone lacked conviction.

If anything, a careful observer might have detected, as Leigh did, the slightest touch of cynicism in the emphatic but absolutely non-committal voice of the solicitor.

At the entrance to Heathfield's study, Leigh, who had been introduced merely out of form, was dismissed to his own duties. It was only upon his return from a tour of inspection which revealed little more than had already been reported that he learnt from the now

no longer professionally closed lips the secret of the last codicil which Mrs. Heathfield had added to her will, which otherwise bore the date of the first year of their marriage, in which, as might be supposed, everything had been left to Heathfield absolutely and without conditions.

Grace Seaton, by this codicil, however, was to be the new mistress of Chippendale Manor.

To say that it came as a surprise to Vernon Heathfield is to put it mildly. It came as an absolute blow in the face—though the millionaire tried his best to disguise it.

Conversation accordingly was somewhat strained at lunch.

The philanthropist, upon whose features disappointment was written in large letters, tried to make the best of the situation.

"As you know, from what I have already said," he began, "this comes as a complete surprise to me, but for Grace's sake I am glad."

Here the young girl, still flushed with the news of her good fortune and overcome with gratitude, broke in :

"Oh, but I don't know that I should accept it. Not so long as Uncle is alive, it must still be his home. I could come down, of course, when not playing, but I do think, in spite of this, I ought to put my whole soul into my work on the stage."

Mr. Harcourt made the position perfectly clear.

"Naturally, you can allow anybody you please to occupy Chippendale. But, speaking from a legal point

of view, you cannot help accepting it, and you are equally barred from disposing of it, for both these points are in the hands of the trustees."

The conversation then turned to minor details of administration, death duties, minor legacies, outstanding obligations, and all the routine of executorship. But Leigh was lost in the one thought of why there should have been such a sudden secrecy between two people who, to the outer world, were looked upon as the perfect example of old-world domestic happiness and trust.

To Leigh's surprise, immediately after lunch, Harcourt asked to see him privately, and, though Heathfield at once gave permission, it was obvious that he thought the request, taking place in his own house, as rather lacking in professional etiquette.

"I understand, Mr. Leigh," began the family solicitor of the late Mrs. Heathfield, "that you are representing the Yard, which has been called in by the local police."

"That is so," replied the detective. "Is there anything I can do, or any information I can give?"

"Yes, and no," said Mr. Harcourt. "As a matter of fact, I have been in consultation with the family physician of the deceased, who tells me that for some years past Mrs. Heathfield was internally a nervous wreck, though to the outer world she always kept up the stout, brave heart by which we all knew her."

"You suggest that there may have been something on her mind?" ventured Leigh.

"Exactly," replied the lawyer. "And this codicil,

executed so unexpectedly and such a short time before her death, seemed to confirm the family physician's own observations. Obviously if I might be permitted to encroach upon your own province of deduction, it must have been something which she kept from her own husband, since otherwise he would have been made the confidant of her intentions."

"Not necessarily," said the detective. But the lawyer went on.

"Anyway, be that as it may, the point I am trying to raise is not the mental state of Mrs. Heathfield before death, but the physical condition of Mrs. Heathfield's body after death."

Leigh pricked up his ears.

"Before coming down here," continued Mr. Harcourt, "I took the liberty, as I say, of calling upon the family physician, and in addition to the question he raised is one which, speaking in strict confidence, I think you should be aware of."

"Yes," said Leigh.

"It appears the local doctor, a somewhat timorous individual and not too well endowed with this world's goods, made certain observations which were overridden at the inquest on the score of his well-known scrupulousness, and for the fear of the unnecessary scandal to which it might give rise."

Leigh was all attention.

"It is a rather technical point, I understand, but I believe that science has made such strides that it is possible to gauge almost to within half an hour the actual moment of death."

Leigh remembered the reports as they had reached the Yard from the local police: the dagger embedded

up to the hilt in the breast, the little trace of blood, either in the clasp or about the wound, or round about on the ground, which had been trampled almost hard by the servants of Chippendale Manor.

"The question arises, therefore," continued the lawyer, "as to *when* exactly Mrs. Heathfield was murdered, and *how*. For, and mark my words," added Mr. Harcourt, "Dr. Gainsford was by no means satisfied in his own mind that the mode of her death was what it appeared."

Leigh took him up here, as the professional always does the amateur.

"You forget, Mr. Harcourt," said the detective, "that, according to all accounts, Mrs. Heathfield's screams for help, and cries of murder, were actually heard by all his staff, shortly after two o'clock, so that at any time between then and the evening when she was found the deed may have been perpetrated, and, as you suggest, the dagger plunged into an already lifeless body. But we are still faced with the major problem of the situation: why was the body brought back into the grounds?"

To this the lawyer could make no reply.

Even, as he seemed to confound the lawyer's reasoning, Leigh had to admit the point raised was certainly a new one. For hitherto the actual length of time Mrs. Heathfield had been dead had only been surmised, starting from the sound of the cries as the one fixed point.

Yet was it really a fixed point beyond all possible doubt?

Leigh was not the first detective who had inwardly cursed to himself the bungling methods of well-meaning

nonentities who measured the impossible by the compass of their own experience.

Everyone had heard the voice and recognised it, and followed its movement, as the car from whence it had emanated had raced down the avenue, and yet, strange to say, the gate porter could throw no light on the matter.

The car, explained the fellow, was approaching at such a pace that it was all he could do to look after himself, let alone looking as to who was either at the wheel or beside it.

The one clue that could have established as a fixed point the actual moment at which Mrs. Heathfield had been *seen* alive by any one was therefore lost ; just as her burial, before a scientific test had been made, had destroyed every hope of ever doing so now that the body was in the earth—and anything else was too vague to be valuable.

For instance, Mrs. Heathfield's maid, as has already been explained, was away ill, and Heathfield had been down in the lounge with his guests for well over three quarters of an hour after leaving his wife in their bedroom, so that this seemed to establish one fixed point at least. But, put the fixed point where one would, the real problem was still what Leigh and the Yard had diagnosed in the case from the first—viz., that there was a purpose beyond every single circumstance apparent to the general public.

This Leigh made perfectly clear to the lawyer.

" Let us imagine, my dear sir, that A B C, or even X, is the murderer, we are no nearer the real solution of this case unless we can discover the motive behind the act. For I find it as impossible to believe that

Mrs. Heathfield was murdered in the manner in which she was murdered for any personal reason."

The lawyer repeated the phrase to himself—
"Murdered in the manner in which she was murdered."
Yes, possibly the young detective was right. Who could tell?

CHAPTER VII

The Chief's Mystery Holiday

THE day he left, Ladman had issued particular instructions that he did not wish to be shadowed during his holiday, nor even recognised : and, if ever anyone had earned his right to the joys of a month's incognito and all it connoted to a man who had been in the limelight for years, it was the Chief.

But Scotland Yard little thought, as the command began to be obeyed from the very first policeman on point duty at Putney Hill, who looked the opposite way as the familiar Winmore car passed towards the High Street, and so across the bridge to the Metropolitan station, that this instruction would be used to launch upon England one of the most daring conspiracies ever hatched in modern times.

The porters tipped their caps as Sir Thomas Ladman's chauffeur called them to take his master's bags. But they missed the familiar smile which the Chief usually had for everyone who did him even the meanest service.

Two newsboys, less deferential, jostled each other in their eagerness to serve the Chief with the latest evening paper, and the unsuccessful urchin consoled himself with screaming the latest news :

" Chippendale Murder Mystery ! Chief on the Spot ! Latest Clues ! "

The addition of a sly wink, a nudge, and a jerk of

the head in his direction, accompanied by a furtive comparison of the photograph in the news-sheet and himself by a crowd of curious business men who had taken the hint, told Sir Thomas Ladman, as to the outer world the scoundrel now was, that his disguise was perfect.

One month in order to perfect himself in every detail of the part for which he had been selected, and for which his master had been preparing him, and the rest would be easy, or comparatively so.

At any rate, the most difficult stage was passed : a few weeks spent in the midst of those whose familiarity with the details of the " machine " had not been acquired without considerable sacrifice, and he would be word perfect.

Sheer bravado, in fact, made the new Sir Thomas Ladman get out at Westminster, within a few feet of Scotland Yard, where, as everyone knows, it adjoins the station, in order to try the effect of the last command and test the power of his new authority.

Right through the Embankment gateway, under the huge arch that spans the two main portions of the building, and out through the main entrance in Whitehall passed the Chief, and he might have been the most insignificant nonentity from the suburbs.

Not a hand was lifted in salute, not an eye suggested recognition. For that was the way the Yard had been drilled, and those who had been in the Navy often assured their new colleagues that the discipline of a battleship was not more severe than that at Scotland Yard.

Confidence at once rushed like an electric current through his veins.

Once captain and on the bridge, then the great ship would have to do its duty, its engines, intended for protective purposes only, turned against itself, if so went forth the word of command.

He looked at the great pile, which reared its heights—six months out of the twelve lost to view half-way across the road in London fog—and he marvelled at the magic power it exercised even to the remotest ends of the earth; yet at the same time he smiled at the simplicity of the ruse by which he was to make it do his bidding.

Then, as the papers put it, Sir Thomas Ladman left for the Continent to take a month's holiday, "but it is understood that the case of the Chippendale Murder Mystery is in the hands of one of the ablest of the younger men who have been trained in his methods, and there is every hope of some important clues coming to light that may lead to the discovery of the murderers of the late Mrs. Heathfield long before his return."

On the other side of the Channel the French police authorities, who under other conditions would have given the Chief an official welcome, refrained out of courtesy, and at Paris, where it was known he arrived, the same incognito was preserved.

After that even the most clever of the continental secret service agents—society's invisible army of protection—knew him no more, but by a singular coincidence Mère Poussain's strange habitués at the little Café de la Liberté in Montmartre suddenly ceased

to foregather as they had been wont to do for weeks past.

The Paris agents, however, who, to give them their due, began to watch the place rather closely, saw no reason for linking two such apparently disconnected facts, nor were they intended to do so.

The crooks had only met there to get their orders while the plans they were being engaged for were maturing, now they were carrying them out, each at his own post.

A week or so later, however, the foreign office might possibly have noticed a certain unusual demand for special passports from different portions of Europe to England, but only for actors. The master brain, however, which alone would have been able to pierce through this subtle subterfuge by reference to the secret archives of Scotland Yard was *on holiday*, if such term can be applied to the secret occupant of Chippendale Manor.

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Meanwhile abroad things were maturing apace, for not only were the conspirators counterplanning one of the most difficult campaigns ever conceived for their destruction, but they were fighting what even the greatest generals must fear occasionally—time.

“Look here, Gerolstein,” said Zitinoff, addressing the man whose clothes and linen bore the name ‘Ladman,’ “it is all very well feeling confident, but do not forget that your difficulties will grow every second from the first minute you take up your duties at the Yard.”

“Exactly,” replied the pseudo Chief. “All that I understand. My duty is perfectly clear and simple.

All you want is the secret dossier of the records of the brotherhood, which you tell me is in one of the vaults of the Yard, ready to be despatched to Geneva."

"Yes, and you know the price we are willing to pay for your services," said Zitinoff.

"Half a million," replied the crook.

"Exactly, and you will find us true to our word; besides, you know that if once we are discovered it's all up with every one of us."

"Easy. Easy, comrade," said Gerolstein. "Don't forget you are talking to Sir Thomas Ladman. I'm the man who is putting his neck into the noose, not you fellows."

"Come, come, you are safer than any of us, unless you let yourself down with the vices that have made you a nondescript wanderer over the world," replied Zitinoff.

"I know which side my bread is buttered, friend," replied the new "Chief." "I have contracted for a month's work at the price of half a million pounds cash, in British gold. But I must make certain that you fellows will not try to double-cross me when the work is done."

"Nonsense! How could we?" said the other.

"Well, what is there to prevent you leaving me in the lurch once my work is done and I've handed over the swag?"

"You know the penalty of refusal," said Zitinoff, with a threatening look.

"That's not the point, for if it's merely a choice of deaths——" And for a moment the Chief fixed him with the fearless look of the born desperado.

The two men paused for a moment. After all,

honesty among thieves is not an ethical code: it is the only basis of co-operation between men who, in nine cases out of ten, hold not merely their own but each other's lives in their hands.

"You are right," said Zitinoff. "And upon this matter I think I can give you the best assurances you can expect."

"You mean the assurance that Ladman at this very moment is alive," said Gerolstein.

"Yes," replied Zitinoff. "We are expecting news from Chippendale this very afternoon by courier."

Châteaux are cheap in France since the war, and, with the facilities offered by rapidly moving motor-cars, it is possible for individuals to exist, and live an almost unknown existence. For, once landed, they can go about their business without once coming into contact with the police, or the host of minor officials who keep track of foreigners at railway stations and hotels and pleasure resorts generally.

Hence not a few of the ring-leaders, who for reasons best known to themselves were wont to frequent the Café de la Liberté in Montmartre for the purpose of dealing with the rank and file, now chose this mode of avoiding the eagle eye of the Paris police, and for this reason the Château de Genouillac, close to the Brittany coast, had been singled out to serve them as G.H.Q.

Hither, as a living link between operations in England and operations on the Continent, was expected no less a person than the private chauffeur of Vernon Heathfield, Griggs by name; incidentally, the same who had driven Sir Thomas Ladman from Winmore, Wimbledon,

on the dread mission which was still a secret to the world.

Abroad, however, Drydale Griggs travelled in style, under a different name and in the guise of a gentleman of means and great social position, at least among the fraternity, and it was he they were expecting.

The sound of a horn with a peculiar note announced him as his car drove up the avenue through the ancient gateway and finally came to a stop at the drawbridge of the Château de Genouillac.

"Ah, here he is!" said Zitinoff, who at Genouillac was known as Monsieur le Comte, a central European nobleman ruined by his patriotism. "Now we shall have the very latest news at first hand."

A moment later and the tall, athletic figure of the Englishman stepped into the salon, where the above conversation had already taken place.

"Sir Thomas Ladman, I presume," said Griggs, with all the solemnity of Dr. Livingstone meeting Stanley, in Central Africa.

Gerolstein accepted the salutation, but hardly in the facetious spirit in which it was meant.

He felt that now that they had got him into their power these men were mocking him, and he was in no mood for jokes.

"Look here," said the Chief, "this is no laughing matter. I have been talking it out with Zitinoff, and I must have complete assurance that my *exit*, so to speak, will be as simple as my *entry* in this world melodrama."

Drydale Griggs, the most suave of ruffians ever born, instantly changed his tone.

"My dear Gerolstein," he began, "take it from me,

that there are far more necks anxious about your own fate than you are anxious about. If you want to know, everything is working admirably: I mean, your namesake is in the best of health, though, I am sorry to say, hardly in the best of tempers. And, of course, blissfully unconscious of his understudy's success."

The new Chief showed reassurance all over his face.

"Your exit, between you and me," continued Griggs, "is far more a matter of solicitude at Chippendale than your entry; for upon your *exit* depends the permanence of our victory over the Yard."

Then came the full details of the diabolical plot which the conspirators had in mind.

"I admit that the documents we are after would in themselves be worth all the risks we are taking to obtain them. But there is a sweeter thing than victory."

"I should like to know it," said the crook.

"Revenge," said Zitinoff, taking the words out of Griggs's mouth. "Do you think victory is enough to compensate the years of gaol and the life of torture which some of our men are doomed to undergo, and some have undergone, just because this man has said, 'Thou shalt not kill; Thou shalt not steal'—as if he were a god?"

This was Zitinoff in a new light, the revolutionary behind the crook. And he rambled on, "What are the conditions under which millions of workers are living all over the world, but organised theft and organised murder by the bigger dog——" But Griggs cut him short.

"My dear Zitinoff, let's be honest with each other as
Fy

fellow thieves. We're not out for the good of humanity; we're not making sacrifices to feed the multitude. We rob because we are poor, just as the rich preach the Ten Commandments to protect their wealth. Every man has his price, and Gerolstein is working for himself, not for his widow——"

The calm cynicism of the whole thing, the unemotional business contract of this cold-blooded Englishman, surpassed the comprehension of the excitable Slav temperament.

"The exact date of your release," Griggs continued, "a month, or possibly at the most six weeks, is what is conjectured. But it is an essential part of our plans that there must be a second transformation, to complete the first."

"That is what I want to make sure of," said the victim.

"Quite naturally, my dear Sir Thomas Ladman," replied Griggs. "And I promise to return you safely to the same insignificance from which we originally took you if you do what I tell you. No court of law can make a man shave, and the worst you have to fear is a lifetime of whiskers, but it's preferable to a lifetime of penal servitude, which we could get you now." And the truth of this threat sank in.

Then, stopping the banter, which the Englishman was beginning to fear was rather lost upon the foreigner, Drydale Griggs came down to "brass tacks."

"If your *exit* is going to make you nervous before the footlights, so to speak, then let me dispel your stage-fright. I have been in consultation with several brain specialists: that is to say, Heathfield has, and, for the purpose of the return to life, Ladman is being so treated

that his whole sojourn will appear even to himself as nothing more than a bad dream."

"Yes?" said his namesake.

"That, as you will understand, is to be our revenge," continued Griggs. "For by that means Sir Thomas Ladman can only regain his liberty at the price of his reputation for sanity."

"How so?"

"Why, perfectly simply," continued the Englishman. "His last contact with the outer world was when he went to bed in the Elizabethan bed at Chippendale Manor. The next morning, as you are yourself witness, everybody in the neighbourhood is prepared to say they saw Sir Thomas Ladman emerge through the lodge gates in company with his host, motoring in the direction of Wimbledon. Here, the Chief's own servants noticed, as you tell me, certain peculiarities about your behaviour, and upon these, from all accounts, they are commenting at this very moment."

Zitinoff and Gerolstein exchanged glances of admiration.

"At the right moment," continued Griggs, "when Sir Thomas Ladman's marvellous brain is still baffled by the Mystery of Chippendale Manor, what more simple than that he should awake in the self-same bed, which he will take over, still warm from your own slumbers, and try to convince the world with the cock and bull story which the truth will then appear to the general public."

The foreigners laughed aloud. Could Dumas himself have devised such a plot?

"In a word," concluded the chauffeur, "Sir Thomas Ladman, whose brain was to have become the model

of the new science of criminology in Europe, will only regain his liberty to qualify for an asylum, and we are saved.

"Geneva will never tolerate the name of Scotland Yard afterwards except as a joke, for we will have laughed it out of court."

Gerolstein seemed convinced and Zitinoff satisfied.

"There is one difficulty which we must face," said the former. "That is the question of handwriting and thumb-marks. A month is a long time under observation."

"Granted," said Griggs. "And for this reason I suggest that the occasion of your return to duty, my dear Sir Thomas Ladman, should be a very sad accident in the Tyrol, in Switzerland. You know what I mean, a photograph of the Chief Commissioner of Police, with arm in sling and head bandages, but still at his desk. The Press agencies will jump at it, and," he added, "it may help any little idiosyncrasies or strange lapses of memory when back in harness."

All this time, over in England other preparations were being made. The Press for a moment seemed to have forgotten the Chippendale Murder Mystery, and was full of glowing tributes to the genius of Professor Estankraft and the plays he was bringing over to London for the international season.

Heathfield, as the uncle of the actress who was to play the leading rôle, was once again before the public eye. Grace Seaton's face was in every society paper, and literary and political journals devoted columns to the theme of the plays; for, truth to tell, the

literary aspect of this new drama was only second to its political aspect.

The *Morning Post*, alone among the great London dailies, came out with a strong attack upon Estankraft, with the result that the other papers felt bound to take the opposite side in a controversy, taking up the "Art for Art's sake" point of view, and Heathfield, who had the popular sympathy already because of his bereavement and his relation to the brilliant young actress who was to take the leading rôle in the plays, wrote a masterly letter to *The Times* about it.

The whole thing was worth hundreds in publicity, as any attempt to interfere with public liberty always is, but, even if the rest of England had been convinced of the worth of the plays, Dandy Leigh would not have altered his own private opinion about them.

To him they were no more "Art for Art's sake" than Grace Seaton was put into the leading rôle for the sake of giving an English girl a chance in an international movement.

Going further than the Robots and the insect plays, with which London was at one time deluged, these plays were so constructed and written in such a vein that the theme was rather a disguise than a revelation of the author's mind.

Why had Grace Seaton been brought in? This simple convent girl plunged into a very maelstrom of revolutionary propaganda, which she would be made to symbolise without ever having understood the principles which she was expected to expound?

CHAPTER VIII

“ Art for Art’s Sake ? ”

ALL the while that Dandy Leigh found himself coming more and more under the spell of romance, the Yard, as a result of the apparent stalemate in the Chippendale affair, was coming in for a good deal of criticism all round.

The Chief’s continued absence, moreover, gave the criticism a personal note, and Leigh was now feeling the reflection upon himself very keenly.

Was this all the years of training under such a master could bring forth ?

At the outset, when Sir Thomas Ladman had expressed such confidence in him as not to postpone his holiday, even though the Press seemed determined he should, the case appeared comparatively simple.

He had looked upon it as a mere battle of brains between a gang of crooks determined to discredit Scotland Yard and foil its attempt to make a clean sweep of crime for ever. Mrs. Heathfield, in other words, was being used as an ideal innocent victim whose death would arouse popular sympathy to such an extent that the longer its perpetrators remained undiscovered the greater would become the indignation against the Yard.

Now, since his own visit to Chippendale Dandy Leigh

had come to the conclusion that far from being the last act of despairing bravado, it was merely the preliminary to something far more sinister.

But what? How? And by whom? That was the question which was ever present before his mind. And he was trying to keep his mind away from the emotions of his heart.

The mysterious codicil, unfortunately, had set Grace Seaton in the very forefront of the problem; but the circumstances which had established a closer and a sweeter link made it difficult to put convincingly in official phraseology.

Leigh's first act, therefore, upon his return to the Yard had been to discuss the whole matter with Morecombe, a colleague who, the very antithesis of himself in outward appearance and manner, was no less trusted by Sir Thomas Ladman.

Charles Morecombe, a rough diamond of cockney extraction, but cute as the proverbial fox, shook his head.

"I'm sorry to say we seem no nearer than at the start, Dandy," he said, "though we've had the Flying Squad out in every direction, examined every inch of the old park walls, compared the finger-prints of all the servants with the files, traced the route taken by the car, which does not appear to have stopped once from the moment it emerged from the gates at Chippendale, unless perhaps on the roadside to transfer the body for its return, if, indeed, it ever emerged from the park."

The last phrase was said in a sort of tentative tone, which Morecombe sometimes employed when he was not quite prepared to substantiate a definite suggestion.

Leigh acknowledged the ruse.

"So your mind has been running along those lines, has it?" And, had he told the whole truth as it was taking shape in his own mind, he would have added, "That is the very point I have been trying to establish myself."

"Well, you see, it's this way," continued the cockney. "It seems pretty obvious, whoever committed the murder, that the position in which Mrs. Heathfield's body was found after the way she was kidnapped was evidently intended to deceive somebody, if not those at the Manor, then those whose duty it would be to try and follow up the clues."

"Quite logical, Morecombe—the false scent is one of the oldest criminal dodges," said Leigh.

"That being so, then," continued the cockney, "the less we judge by outward appearances the better: but it's hard for the Yard, in face of popular indignation, to make this public. People see the clues, as they call them; it's the duty of the police to follow them up, and if they fail—then the inference is we don't know our job."

"Exactly! And, with Ladman away," replied Leigh, "their natural inference will be that Scotland Yard is not yet the automatic machine that we want it to be, and that when the cat is away the mice will play." And then Leigh, breaking from the subject, added, "Oh, by the way, have we any reports to hand from any other department that might help to throw a light on the enemy's latest movements?"

The latter was a reference to one of Ladman's most wonderful innovations in treating with crime. Just

as during the war airships and planes kept continued watch over the lines for any new disposition of forces, so the Secret Squad, working through invisible eyes, kept track of ticket-of-leave men, convicted criminals, with every person with a mysterious income, and still more mysterious professions.

Long before a crime was committed it had already been signalled, therefore, and the culprit allowed to walk to his destruction.

"Strange you mention that," replied Morecombe. "For it was just the point I wanted to bring up. As you know, Paris and Berlin and New York have already notified the absence of well-known crooks from their habitual beats. Our own information tells the same tale. Several provincial crooks have come to London, for example. The banks announce an unusual amount of foreign notes in circulation, and pawnbrokers say that jewellery of every description is coming in to them from the strangest quarters. Again, Hyde Park orators have almost doubled in number, and their oratory doubled in violence."

Leigh for the first time for a whole week seemed pleased—if the word is not taken in the sense of rejoicing—over the indications of a coming crime-wave.

Getting the reports more in detail, he found that the change practically synchronised with the crime he had in hand, suggesting that the murder of Mrs. Heathfield had far deeper ramifications than he had even suspected.

The upward line on the charts which were written up at Scotland Yard week by week showed a sudden jump just three days before the event, and had been abnormal ever since: indeed, not for over a decade

had there been such indications of forthcoming activities in the crime world.

Was the great coup of which Sir Thomas Ladman had spoken upon the eve of his departure to take place before his return?

His subordinate did not relish the idea, but everything seemed to indicate some unparalleled criminal activity.

CHAPTER IX

The Return of the Chief

“**S**COTLAND YARD CHIEF in motor accident ” was the first headline in the *Daily Mail* that struck Leigh’s eye the morning after the first night of the International Players’ London season.

Leigh had been to the first performance, not because he was interested in the play *Avanti*, but because he wished to see Grace Seaton act.

Sir Thomas Ladman, the paper informed its readers, was on his way back to England at the time of the accident, travelling by motor-car through one of the most dangerous of the Swiss mountain passes.

From the chauffeur’s account, it appeared that it had started to rain and that he was about to fix the windscreen wiper, when he heard a noise like thunder. Glancing up, to his horror, he saw a gigantic piece of rock hurling itself down the mountainside. He had barely time to apply the brakes before the rock struck the side of the car and overturned it. Dandy Leigh was delighted to read that the accident had not had any fatal results for his Chief, and that he was expected to continue his journey after a short rest, and that he would be back in England in a day or so.

He had just finished reading the account when Morecombe arrived. Leigh pushed the paper across to him.

"Seen that?" he asked.

Morecombe drew in his breath.

"Crikey! So they were right then, after all!" said the cockney, his mind still far away.

"Right? Who were right? Right about what?" said Leigh. But Morecombe still seemed too dazed by the news to speak.

"Have you heard it already, or what?" continued Leigh, not without a certain tone of impatience in his voice.

Then came the thunderbolt, as Morecombe replied, "It was expected."

"Good God! This expected! How? By whom? Where did you hear it? Speak up, man alive! They did try to do him in then?" But Morecombe would not be flurried.

With the strange *sang-froid* of his breed, the more an incident was exciting the more cool Morecombe became. He might lose his temper with a taxi-driver, but with the cold nose of a revolver at his temple he was perfectly academic in his calm.

"Give me a good cigar, Dandy. We've got to think things out, you and me, if ever we want to see the Chief back alive."

Leigh gave him one of his most expensive brands, but the cockney would not be bribed, even in fun.

"No, I said a smoke, not a swank."

"When you left Miss Seaton in her dressing-room, Dandy," began the cockney, with the twinkle in his eye which always indicated one of his successful shadowings, "I followed Heathfield's car."

"Yes, I heard him giving his orders to Griggs, though I could not make out the tongue," said Leigh.

"Oh, there wasn't really any reason for the secrecy. It was only to the Café Regent, a few hundred yards off," replied Morecombe.

Leigh wondered whether, after all, Heathfield had seen him, and given the order in a foreign language in order to put him off the scent.

For the Regent, as was well known at the Yard, was a favourite rendezvous during the war for spies, whom it was more useful to keep under surveillance at large than to arrest and imprison. Here, under the guise of violent art controversies, information would be given and payment made, but camouflaged, of course, under the name of fictitious canvases. Hence the authorities, fully aware of the ruse, had not interfered, and in their fancied security the spies always walked into the trap, and in consequence incriminated everyone who came in contact with them.

Morecombe, to whom the whole game was familiar, continued, "So I just tried the old wartime trick, you know. Long hair, dirty nails, down-at-heel boots, and a portfolio of daubs, and I looked quite enough of a damned fool to be taken for a genius."

Leigh smiled; for the other knew how to say "Can't speak a word of English" in some twenty-five different foreign languages.

"Go on," said Leigh, amused.

"Well," continued Morecombe, "as I expected, the whole troop of the international crooks——"

"Players, Morecombe, players," corrected Leigh.

"My mistake," said Morecombe. "Anyway, the whole lot was down in the café portion, only a few of

the principals staying upstairs in the private room which Heathfield had booked for fancied security."

"Heathfield did not come down then? He did not, apparently, want to be classed with his friends?"

"No, he arrived and he left by the side entrance, with Estankraft."

"What of the rank and file?"

"That's just what I'm coming to," continued Morecombe. "They had not been down half an hour when they seemed to disperse themselves in every corner of the café, each as though he had a pre-arranged rendezvous with a particular set."

"Talking art?" queried Leigh.

"No, there was little of that. As a matter of fact, there were very few of the Bohemian set there at all, but"—and the cockney said it with a smile—"not a few of His Majesty's late guests of the Eton-crop type, trying to cover their already tinted and broken nails with cigarette smoke."

Leigh knew what Morecombe meant by that. It was a trick which every old oakum-picking lag thought deceived detectives.

"Well," continued Morecombe, "there was, of course, a lot of talk about *Avanti*, and Grace Seaton's interpretation of it, but then the conversation turned to politics. I came across the old tag 'Property is theft' coming up over and over again. I saw some of our friends from Hyde Park who seemed to have developed considerable thirst, and, while listening to their confidences, I overheard them asking for the 'signal,' whatever they meant by that, and asking whether it was perfectly certain it would be simultaneous. But by this time I began to realise I was exciting suspicion."

"Yes, yes, but you spoke of Ladman just now," said Leigh impatiently.

"Coming to that," said Morecombe, who always resented interruption. "As I was saying, I had done all I could do safely, when I turned to go. But, just as I did so, I overheard a couple apparently in heated argument.

"I managed to drop my hat as I passed their table, and, taking my time to pick it up, stooping the while, I distinctly heard them say, 'He ought to be back any day now, but I expect he'll go to the hospital first.'"

"Yes, but what made you connect such a vague phrase, which might apply to anyone, to the Chief in particular?" said Leigh.

"Because," said Morecombe, "one of them said, 'We'll know by to-morrow's paper.'"

For a few seconds Leigh was too staggered to speak : the coincidence seemed so conclusive and yet so impossible. But Morecombe was taking no risks.

"Look here, Dandy," he said, "I was of the same opinion myself till you showed me this." And he pointed to the cutting from the *Mail*. "But this puts a new complexion upon the whole thing. There's something afoot, and nothing good, and it's my belief this 'Art for Art's sake' is just camouflage and nothing more."

"If what you say is true, then we should lose no time. I've my own suspicions, and from far more intimate observations." And Leigh proceeded to unfold the incident of a drug which he had secured from the hands of Grace Seaton herself.

"Who should we set upon them?" said Morecombe. For answer Dandy Leigh went to the telephone.

"Hello! Soho 6958. . . . Ludi . . . that you? . . . Leigh speaking. . . . Want you to come round immediately. . . . Special."

Five minutes later a taxi was pulling up at Leigh's flat, and there emerged a small, unshaven, half-dressed little foreigner, trembling from head to foot.

The latter was an unusual state in Ludi, who usually presented a look of courage and determination, but he hastened to explain himself.

"'Phone message no good, no good," said the little ex-waiter of the Regent in his broken English. "Many peoples no like Ludi since war, many peoples." Which was a reference he had taken the side of the Allies, going out to Italy for service long before that nation had declared her determination to stand by France and England.

The war had been his making, however, for since he had become a confirmed constitutionalist and, as a matter of fact, out of sheer patriotism volunteered information to the authorities, whenever foreigners in his hearing took advantage of English hospitality and freedom to plot insurrection, revolution, or crime.

His was a peculiar psychology, and he would have resented the epithet of spy as indignantly as a man who had seen the outbreak of a conflagration would have resented the word sneak for running to the nearest fire station.

"Look here," said Leigh, "I've rung you up for a special purpose. You see this." And he indicated the story in the *Mail*. "I want you to do everything you can to find out just what these 'Players' are after

in this country. What are their own views of their plays, and where they think they will lead to, what they are doing and saying and thinking when they mix as they do with Englishmen who have never so far shown any interest in art."

The man's eyes lit up. "That man Estankraft, you mean, who tried to get his plays in Rome, but was not allowed. Oh, I can find out everything about him. I know woman, little girl, Diabolo——" And he broke off with curses more impressive than informative.

Then a strange thing happened, for just as Leigh was showing the little fellow out into the street there emerged from a shadowy porch not more than twenty yards from his door two figures in dark cloaks.

Ludi had no sooner taken a few paces across the street than the two figures accosted him, asked him the way to Paddington in Italian, and, thanking him profusely, made their way off leisurely in the opposite direction, while Ludi broke into a run and then hailed a taxi, and told the driver to drive back to Soho as quickly as possible.

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On arrival at Scotland Yard, Dandy Leigh found a wire awaiting him from his Chief.

"Accident not serious. Shall be back to-morrow. Please have full report progress in the Chippendale Murder Case."

CHAPTER X

Within the Enemy's Citadel

THE first thing Leigh did on arrival at Scotland Yard the following morning was to hurry up to his Chief's room.

From the very first moment his voice answered "Come in!" Leigh realised that the Chief was *not his usual self*.

There was not a smile of greeting as his young subordinate entered, nor was there any answer to his well-bred inquiry about his accident.

Sir Thomas Ladman, with his bandaged arm still in a sling, motioned Leigh to a chair.

"Look here, Leigh," he said, at once plunging *in medias res*, "I'm not going to beat about the bush, any more than I want to be unnecessarily offensive; but, candidly, is this all that you have to show for these weeks of work?" And he made a contemptuous gesture in the direction of the Chippendale report.

Leigh could hardly believe his ears. His own disappointment was already hard to bear in face of his Chief's parting words of confidence; but Sir Thomas Ladman had never even suggested any lack of goodwill or perseverance on his part before. It literally staggered him, and he found himself hesitating for a reply that would do justice to the difficulties of the case without appearing to be an excuse.

"I'm afraid, sir, as you will see by the reports from every department, the case so far has not yielded any decisive clues, and what clues there are, if even we can call them clues, seem so conflicting as to suggest, and I am also of this opinion, that they were deliberately planned to put us off the scent."

"So that's all these fifteen years of training under me has brought forth, is it?"

"Well, sir," said Leigh, trying to shift the controversy on to more objective data, "if you will only look at the points in detail——"

The Chief made no reply, but, leaning back, seemed as if he wanted his young subordinate to incriminate himself.

Leigh knew well the old French motto, "*qui s'excuse s'accuse*," but, on the other hand, Sir Thomas Ladman was far too English in mind to follow that, preferring the native principle of never "condemning a man unheard." Indeed, the Chief's usual manner was to take up his subordinate's premises, and, when they led to an absurdity, show him the flaw in his logic.

This day, however, seemed to be the exception that proved the rule, for the Chief just allowed Leigh to "flounder"—there was no other word for it.

Leigh recapitulated the reasons which had made him eliminate the idea of personal vengeance, of desire for gain, of the crime being an object in itself, coming back, as he had to, from the facts to a hidden motive and as means to an end still hidden from their view.

"In a word," summed up the Chief, "you want the Yard to tell the world that not only are we baffled by

what has happened, but that we shall not find out its real meaning until something else, which we cannot prevent, happens."

Leigh saw that he was on the horns of a dilemma ; but he was much too honest not to admit it. How often had Sir Thomas Ladman impressed upon him the necessity of "facing the facts," even when this seemed to reflect upon himself.

"Well, sir, candidly," continued Leigh, "that's what it seems like, but, if you will pardon me, I must confess that my investigations at Chippendale leave me very dissatisfied and worried."

"Indeed ?" said the Chief, for the first time seeming to take a sympathetic interest. "Why is there nothing to this effect upon your report then ?"

"The matter is somewhat delicate, sir, but I think I may say that, from further acquaintance with the great millionaire—whom we all, and I know you, look upon as the beau ideal of patriotism and charity—I am rather inclined to revise my judgment."

Here Leigh went into the details of the reading of the will and the surprising codicil. Heathfield's enthusiasm for the International Players, and the strange movement in the crime world ever since the murder.

Ladman listened in silence with a touch of his old style. He was noted for it. No one had ever complained that he could not get a hearing from the Chief. If a man had a theory, an idea, even a suggestion, the Chief, pen in hand, set it down, examined it, and, if useful or truthful, accepted it : and Leigh was expecting the usual routine.

Instead, Ladman burst into a scornful laugh.

"Good heavens, man alive! I've never heard such balderdash in my life: certainly never from you."

Leigh, taken aback, could find no fitting reply on the spur of the moment.

Then he remembered the accident. Could it have affected the Chief's memory or mentality that he had come back so strange, or had he really been making a fool of himself? For such was his implicit trust in and respect for the Chief that his opinion, let alone his word, was law to the young detective.

But Leigh would not have been Ladman's pupil if he had not stuck to his guns; which probably surprised the man on whose shoulders the mantle of the Chief had fallen under such strange circumstances.

"Well, sir," said Leigh bravely, "you have always taught me to speak what was in my mind, and I have done so. Candidly I do not like the Chippendale ménage as I have seen it——" But before Leigh could say another word Ladman cut him short with:

"Nor, apparently, does the Chippendale ménage, as you are pleased to call it, like you."

With that the Chief drew from a private drawer a letter which he showed to Leigh.

It was from Chippendale Manor, and bore Vernon Heathfield's signature, while its purport was very much to the point.

It thanked Sir Thomas Ladman for his personal courtesy in coming down and all the trouble he had taken over the case. Heathfield respectfully suggested that the young official might be of more service to them both if he confined his attention to the case upon which

he was employed instead of volunteering his guardianship to the young girl whom the late Mrs. Heathfield had made unexpectedly an heiress.

Dandy felt the hot blood of indignation course through his veins as his Chief fixed him with a cold, critical look.

"I hope, sir," he said proudly, "you have known me long enough to set me above such an insinuation. Whatever I have done I have done in a spirit of chivalry and courtesy, as behoves an English gentleman."

"Tut, tut, tut, my dear fellow!" said Ladman. "Let's keep to facts. You were asked down on the murder of Mrs. Heathfield, not on the protection of Grace Seaton, and I consider Vernon Heathfield has acted very properly in drawing my attention to his suspicions." Then he added slyly, "Which, after all, are hardly less complimentary to you than yours are to him."

Leigh was only too anxious to stick to the facts, and, as much from a sense of duty as from a desire to exculpate himself, wanted to plunge into the details of the case again, but Ladman silenced him.

"Leigh," he said sternly, "believe me, I am very sorry to have had to raise this matter at all, but for old time's sake let us consider it closed." And he replaced the letter in his drawer. "Meanwhile," he added, "I think a little holiday might do you good."

Leigh protested that he did not need one, and, as a matter of fact, was very keen upon following up the movements of the International Players, but Ladman replied:

"I think we can safely leave this to—let me see,

who did you say?" And he pretended to look over the papers.

Leigh at once interposed.

"No, I have not put Ludi's name down in my report," he said. "I was waiting until he had sent in his own, when I would hand it over to you for filing purposes."

Ladman put down a rough pencil note at Leigh's dictation—Ludi Parenzo, with the address of the little shop in Soho over which he worked, and then completed the interview with a curt:

"Thank you Leigh, that will do for the present. I'm rather tired."

Leigh left the Yard, his head and heart a whirl of conflicting thoughts and emotions.

If anybody had told him a month before that Sir Thomas Ladman would ever speak to him in the manner he had apparently done during the uncomfortable quarter of an hour he had just gone through, Leigh would have said it was psychologically impossible.

As he passed through the gateway into Whitehall, in fact, he half expected to find a messenger running after him from the Chief, calling him back. Ladman had once "tried a man out in that way," but, though he slowed down his pace almost to a saunter, no footsteps followed, no voice called after him.

The only thing that gave him any consolation was that Ladman had not in so many words "taken him off the case"—the one thing a detective dreads most of all—so that there was still a chance of his being of service to Grace Seaton.

Yes, in spite of himself, it was her face rather than

the photograph of the late Mrs. Heathfield that came up before his mind at the moment when his whole future career seemed to be at stake.

Oh, the Chief would come round—must come round : a friendship and confidence, based as it was upon some fifteen years of perilous and responsible work could not collapse like a pack of cards. Impossible.

Meanwhile, however, the man whom Leigh had left in possession of his reports was going carefully over them point by point with anything but the contemptuous verdict which he had passed upon them in Leigh's presence.

He was muttering to himself, and with his bandaged hand making very legible notes upon a half-sheet of Winmore letter-paper.

"If there's one man about whom I shall have to be on my guard it is my dandy friend Leigh," said the scoundrel to himself. "Luckily he looks up to me like a father ; but he may be awkward, with his damned English individuality."

Then, looking round with the furtive glance of the interloper, the crook made a copy of the address of Ludi, and, hastily writing a few words in a strange code, he called for his secretary.

"Oh, just take this down, type it, and bring it back as soon as you can, will you ? " said Sir Thomas Ladman.

The secretary took down in shorthand the following :

"MY DEAR MR. HEATHFIELD,—I have just returned to the Yard after a somewhat exciting holiday, as you may no doubt have seen from the papers ; but feel quite fit for duty in spite of all.

" I am sorry that in my absence so little progress has been made towards the discovery of those responsible for the crime which has meant such a terrible domestic tragedy to you ; but I trust that the next few weeks will see matters moving.

" I must also take this occasion of thanking you for your letter, and note with sorrow the point you make, which shall certainly have my most emphatic co-operation."

Ladman's secretary looked up with the words :

" Will you sign it, sir ? "

The Chief, after a moment's hesitation, replied :

" Oh, just sign it for me, and leave the envelope open. I've a card I want to add."

A few days later Morecombe and Leigh were comparing notes upon the new situation raised by the return of the Chief to duty.

It was an open secret that Sir Thomas Ladman was thoroughly dissatisfied with the progress being made in the Chippendale Murder Mystery.

Leigh's " absence on leave " made this evident at the Yard, while the Press gathered as much from a second visit which the Chief made to Chippendale.

But this was not the reason why Morecombe had come to Leigh's flat with an expression which clearly betokened anxiety of mind.

" What on earth is up now, old friend ? " said Leigh. " You haven't been getting into trouble too, have you ? " This latter in chaffing reference to what he was pleased to call his own " disgrace."

" No. Ladman, in fact, seems to be nicer to me

than before," replied Morecombe. "But the Yard seems to be in a fair stew."

"Do you mind explaining the menu, chef?" said Leigh, in joking reference to the cockney's slang.

"Well, it's this way," continued Morecombe, using his favourite introduction. "Every department seems to be working overtime. Reports and inquiries are coming in from abroad and from the country, but the Chief won't pay the slightest attention to them. 'One thing at a time' is his new motto. We've got to concentrate upon the Chippendale case if it takes a year."

"What's wrong with that?" said Leigh.

"Oh, nothing wrong with that, but it seems a different policy to the plan the Chief left us to work on before he left."

"Do you mean that he does not believe in the theory of a conspiracy?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said the other.

"Then the sooner we can convince him to the contrary the better, that's what I say," replied Leigh. Then he added, "And, by the way, isn't it time we got a report from Ludi?"

Morecombe shook his head.

"That's the second point I want to talk to you about," he replied.

"Go on," said Leigh.

"To tell you the truth, he seems to have let us down."

"Nonsense, man alive! Ludi is far too decent a fellow to do that, especially with his views."

"Anyway, he's not sent in any information."

"Perhaps he's on the job at the present moment."

Again Morecombe shook his head.

"The fact of the matter is he has not been back

home for three days, and his wife is almost out of her mind."

Leigh jumped up.

" Good heavens ! Those men whom we saw crouching in the shadows——" But he did not finish the sentence.

A cold fear gripped the two detectives as they realised the risks run by the honest fellow purely out of a sense of duty towards the law and order of the country which gave him the political freedom his own country denied him.

They called to mind the coincidence of the cloaked figures speaking to Ludi in his own tongue, and then, strangely enough, going away in the direction opposite to that which they were apparently seeking, and lastly Ludi hailing a taxi, which, in the ordinary course of events, would have been beyond his means.

" Are you quite sure ? " said Leigh, visibly anxious at this news of Morecombe's, as his thoughts went back to the strange International brotherhood.

" Absolutely. None of our men on the beat have seen him either, or anyone else ; we sent out a special A.S. (all stations) inquiry only yesterday."

Now Ludi was one of those peaceful domestic foreigners who have really no care in life outside their own homes ; and any little odd jobs of information he did was just in his spare time : no amount of money would have taken him on a whole time occupation away from the domestic hearth.

At the same time, he was as regular in reporting as clockwork, even if the only news were an acknowledgment of failure.

The trouble, however, was that the information was in no sense officially for the Yard, so that the

responsibility was more or less personal as far as the detectives were concerned ; and as such they felt it.

Even as they were speaking a postman's knock came to the door and a letter was pushed through the box.

Leigh hurried to open it, and within an envelope bearing an East End postmark were the following lines, written in Ludi's quaint English.

" Very, very dangerous peoples follow Ludi everywhere. Now hiding, but hope soon return when safe and tell what I have see. Players very bad crooks."

.

" Poor little Dago ! Thank God he's alive, even if in danger," said Morecombe, who looked upon the foreigner with the affection an Englishman has for a faithful watch-dog, prepared to fly at any animal whom he might think capable of setting on his master.

Unfortunately the little " Dago " was not safe, for the very same night the evening specials were screaming out the discovery of a body found floating somewhere down Limehouse reach, with a stiff paper pinned to his clothes upon which had been scrawled the vivid words :

" The first warning."

.

Tears glistened in the eyes of the two detectives as they read the details of the discovery and the clues by which the body had been identified as that of poor little Ludi, who, as only the two detectives knew, had risked and lost his life for England.

Leigh especially was moved, for the significance of

the tragedy came home to him in a doubly personal manner.

"Now, at last, the Chief will believe me when I say there is a conspiracy," he thought to himself. But the Chief needed no convincing.

Was the Chief not already within the very citadel of the enemy? If the enemy did not realise it, that was their account, but he at least needed no convincing.

Probably, however, he would listen with more interest to his young subordinate's powers of persuasion and allow him to lay out all his precautions.

Why not? It was partly for that very reason that the conspirators had planned the capture of the citadel !

CHAPTER XI

Concerning Some Jewels

LATE that same evening the crooks' plans were being formulated at Winmore, whither Griggs was summoned for a consultation.

"Well, what news?" said Drydale Griggs, helping himself to a whisky and soda.

"It's not going to be so easy as we think," replied his host.

"What do you mean by that?"

"To begin with," explained Sir Thomas Ladman, "I find that for some reason or another your movements have already excited a certain amount of suspicion."

"That suspicion, you, of course, as Chief will have to dispel."

"Easier said than done, if you people can't think of a better way of disposing of a curious busybody like this fellow Ludi without sending him floating down the Thames with a warning tacked on to his breast for all the world to see."

Griggs did not agree.

"I think it served its purpose," he said. "We've been too kind already to police spies. But never mind that. What of the dossier with the names we want?"

"That's what I want to talk to you about," replied the other, "but you must first give me time to know

my staff. Besides, before I can do anything I shall have to get rid of a few—one in particular."

"Who is that?"

"Leigh—or Dandy Leigh, as they call him."

A look of hatred spread over the face of Drydale Griggs.

"I hate the fellow too, for, as far as I can make out, he is going to stand between me and my prize."

"Your prize?"

"Yes, Grace Seaton, to whom Mrs. Heathfield has left Chippendale."

"Leave the women out of the case, my friend," said the crook. "We shall have all our work cut out looking after ourselves, if this young fellow has his way."

"You think he suspects?"

Gerolstein recounted the couple of interviews he had had with Leigh, and then went on:

"Luckily I managed to regain this fellow's confidence just as I thought we were going to break openly; but it was no easy matter. I can't dismiss him for an opinion, however absurd; but I can for incompetence. But you must help me; it is imperative. I must get rid of him."

"Yes, I will help you—but only in my own way. Chuck him a baited hook which, with you at the other end of the rod, he will swallow with as much confidence as a sucking child will draw at its mother's breast."

"Don't speak in parables," said the other, and by way of reply Griggs drew forth a well-known volume of fiction—and in five minutes the two had laid their plans to trap Dandy Leigh.

A couple of days later Sir Thomas Ladman was making inquiries at the Yard concerning the number of safe-deposits in London.

A list of the principal ones were laid before him almost immediately, with notes pointing out their respective merits, such as strength, size, position, etc., together with the special precautions taken for their protection.

Ladman, having examined the list one by one, selected three of the principal addresses, and, enclosing them in an envelope, had them dispatched by special messenger to a Mrs. Cranley Watson, of Porchester Square.

Then, ringing his bell, he sent for Dandy Leigh.

"Oh, Leigh," he said in his most affable mood when his young detective appeared, "you know the famous explorer, Mrs. Cranley Watson?"

"The woman who has just come back from the Balkans," said Leigh, remembering several interviews that had appeared in the Press. "Was she not the guest of Prince Grika?"

"Yes, that is the woman," replied the Chief. "As a matter of fact, the Prince, together with his wife, are due to arrive in London this week, as they are to be presented at Court this season."

"The Grika heirlooms are some of the finest in southern Europe I believe," continued Leigh. "I should say it would be a good idea to keep an eye on them."

"Exactly what I was thinking myself," replied the Chief, allowing Leigh to imagine he was taking the initiative. "That's why I was going to ask you to see to it for me."

"Certainly, sir—though it's really a simple job," replied Leigh, not concealing his disappointment.

"Come, come, Leigh," said Ladman, noticing this. "We are not going to re-open our last discussion, are we?"

The point was well chosen, and Ladman prepared to follow up his advantage, as the other accepted.

"As a matter of fact," continued the Chief, "I have a particular reason for asking you to undertake this little matter. For your own particular information, I may add that Mrs. Cranley Watson has asked the Yard for special protection for her late hosts, as she has heard that an attempt will be made to steal these jewels. Hence I have had a list of the principal safe-deposits in London sent to her and am expecting her reply by messenger."

The thing seemed simplicity itself—mere child's play, and Leigh was wondering whether it was not one of those reasons for trying a man for which, as we have already seen, the Chief had a reputation, when a reply came by 'phone.

"Could Sir Thomas Ladman send somebody to whom Mrs. Cranley Watson could chat the matter over, as Prince Grika had unexpectedly arrived that very morning and would probably be lunching with her."

Ladman turned from the receiver to Leigh.

"Oh, Leigh," he said, "this is Mrs. Cranley Watson on the 'phone. I wonder if you could step into a taxi and satisfy her. You know what these fussy women are. I've sent her a list of safe-deposits, but apparently she can't make up her mind. Humour her, my boy. Humour her, and fall in with any suggestion she likes

to put forward. It's probably just fuss, but, as she seems a person of influence, the Yard has to take notice."

Now this was strangely unlike the Sir Thomas Ladman that Leigh knew, to whom the poorest had just as much right to protection and courtesy as the greatest in the land ; but, then, the Chief had been strange ever since his return.

Leigh took his orders, therefore, and prepared to carry them out, irrespective of his own views on the subject.

His views on the Chippendale case had cost him the Chief's confidence ; if he could regain that confidence it might enable him to state his views on the larger issue with greater cogency.

The only thing Leigh did not like about the order was that it appeared, as he thought, to be taking him away from any hope of being of use to Grace Seaton—and Grace Seaton's face was continually before his mind as the taxi hurried the young detective towards the London house of Mrs. Cranley Watson, one of the stateliest of the old mansions in Porchester Square.

CHAPTER XII

A Strange Bank Robbery

MRS. CRANLEY WATSON'S house was all that an English town house could be.

It had been in the family for years, as the old pictures and the magnificent antiques testified. The rooms, too, were all period rooms, and everything was of the very best, regardless of cost, pointing to an ancestry of taste equal to their birth.

Yet Mrs. Cranley Watson seemed as foreign to her surroundings as an American pork-butcher in a moated grange—which was the first thing that struck Leigh as he was ushered into her salon.

"Oh, are you the man from the Yard?" she said, looking at him through her lorgnette. And she looked surprised that Leigh's tailor had not broadcast the fact sartorially.

"Sir Thomas Ladman has asked me to call on you," said Leigh, with a dignity in every way equal to that of the Society explorer. "Perhaps you will be good enough to say in what way we can be of use."

"Well," continued her untitled ladyship, "it's not so much upon my own account, as for my great friend Prince Grika. You know, the famous Balkan family——"

"And I understand," broke in Leigh, "that you want special precautions."

"That I confess," said Mrs. Cranley Watson, "was my first suggestion, but since then I have been in communication with my friends, and they seem loth to put the Yard to any trouble. In fact, as the Prince himself put it, we thought that the less publicity about the matter the better."

Leigh answered her that the Yard could keep a secret as well as anyone.

"That's not what I mean," was the woman's reply. "But, upon the supposition that the Prince's retinue has been shadowed, it is quite possible that the jewels would be followed too, so that I'm not quite sure that a safe-deposit is a safe deposit!"

The joke was very weak, and Leigh preferred to ignore it, while Mrs. Cranley Watson continued:

"We were thinking therefore—the Princess and myself—that if they only kept their trinket-case at Claridge's, where they are stopping for the present, and brought the jewels here, any thieves would be foiled."

"You have, of course, a safe upon the premises," ventured Leigh.

"That would not be necessary," replied Mrs. Cranley Watson, "for, needless to say, I should not propose to keep them here." And she propounded her plan.

"I have spoken to my bank manager," she said, "and also to the Princess, and we thought that it would be quite a cute idea to transfer them there."

The word 'cute' seemed quite out of keeping with the surroundings, but Leigh pretended not to notice it.

"I shall be myself transferring a large box containing manuscripts and documents, which I collected during my last tour in the Balkans, and the two packets

could go together, without anyone suspecting the value of the smaller one," continued Mrs. Cranley Watson ; and then she added significantly, " but this is, of course, where I want you to come in."

" Want me to come in?" said Leigh, not quite following the train of thought.

" Yes," repeated Mrs. Cranley Watson, " this is where I want you to come in. I want you to call at Claridge's for the jewels, bring them here, pack them in the presence of two others from Scotland Yard, and see them into the bank premises."

Leigh considered a moment. " I take it," he said, " that, in order not to arouse any suspicion, it might be better for us to arrive and leave in some disguise."

" Exactly—the very thing!" And the woman went on to suggest a scheme. " Why not come over as ordinary furniture removers? "

.

A couple of days later Dandy Leigh, Morecombe, and a couple more plain clothes men might have been seen arriving in a plain furniture van at Claridge's. And, from the moment they left Claridge's to the time when placing them on the ground with his own hands beside the trunk, he withdrew backwards through the strong-room door, Leigh never left his eyes off the precious parcel containing the jewels.

He was beside the manager too when the latter closed the special lock, and, as he glanced through the small spyhole before turning his back on the safe-room, the parcel was still there.

In a word, it was impossible to conceive of a precaution which Leigh and his associates had not taken before leaving the bank.

As to the bank itself, being a corner building, it could be kept under observation from two distinct side-streets without posting anyone in its immediate vicinity to attract attention.

Two policemen on point duty therefore kept watch at a discreet distance while the pantechucon went off, and they did not move away until, about an hour later, a couple of very ordinary individuals took rooms in houses adjoining the square.

One of these ordinary individuals was no other than Dandy Leigh himself, and throughout the whole night he kept his eyes upon the bank premises, but without noting anything even to suggest that their ruse had been seen through.

But he could quite understand the nervousness of the little local bank manager with something like a quarter of a million pounds lying in a room just below the basement, which any novice in the burgling line could have opened as easily as a meat-safe.

Shortly after seven o'clock, Leigh was relieved by Morecombe, also disguised.

"Well," said the cockney, "nobody yet after his Nibs' gee-gaws"—for Morecombe had a supreme contempt for jewellery, which to him was the root of all evil.

"Not so far," replied Leigh. "To me it seems as if it was a lot of fuss about nothing; but one never knows."

"Ah, well," replied the other, "if it was not for diamonds and pearls, I suppose Scotland Yard might put up the shutters."

But Leigh was too sleepy to feel like an argument, and was glad to get home to bed while it was yet

dark and there was not much chance of anyone spotting his return in disguise.

The jewels were safe for another day. The next night might bring its own worries, but in another couple of hours the manager would be able to see the precious parcel for himself. So that was that—and Leigh had hardly laid his head upon his pillow before he fell off into a well-earned sleep.

In his dreams, however, his thoughts went back to the case from which he had been taken so unjustly ; for, try as he would, he could not reconcile the Chief's conduct with his character.

Leigh could not have been asleep more than three hours before he was rudely awakened by the ringing of his telephone.

It was from the Yard and to the effect that the Chief wanted to see him at once.

Generally his Chief 'phoned him direct, such was the intimate state of their relations ; and Leigh thought it was rather strange that Sir Thomas Ladman should have broken through a custom which was so characteristic. However, as the message emphasised the urgency of his summons, the young detective jumped into his clothes, after a hurried wash and shave, and, rushing out, hailed the first passing taxi.

" I wonder what's the matter now," he said to himself, as the vehicle rushed through the traffic in the direction of Scotland Yard. " Surely it can't possibly be about the jewels." And he tried to think of some new development in the case upon which his heart was fixed.

Unfortunately it was about the jewels, and things

were already at boiling-point in preparation for the young detective's arrival. For Mrs. Cranley Watson, accompanied by no less a personage than Prince Grika himself, and the local bank manager, had been waiting for Sir Thomas Ladman fully half an hour before the Chief's arrival, all of them in a state bordering on hysteria, with the terrible news that the jewels had been stolen.

Yet the lock of the safe-room had not been tampered with, nor had any other of the deposits been touched. The door had not even been opened, when the official in charge, looking through the little grill, had rushed up to announce that they appeared to be missing, as, upon close inspection, proved to be the case.

To all intents and purposes, in fact, all the Scotland Yard precautions looked like locking, or at least watching, the stable after the horse had gone ; and all Fleet Street was announcing this to the world, and had been long before Dandy Leigh had reached the Yard.

The first intimation that Dandy Leigh got of the crime, therefore, was just as his taxi, sweeping out of the Park, came towards the Whitehall entrance of the famous building.

" Bank Robbery in Porchester Square," came the cry of the newsboys, though Leigh could hardly believe his ears.

Leigh stopped the taxi and bought one of the special editions.

The impossible had happened ! In large print, half across the page, was the announcement in heavy type, while below was a long personal interview with Mrs. Cranley Watson herself.

In it she explained how, going down to the bank in order to extract certain documents from among the papers she had sent there in a large deed-box—as she described it—by mistake, she had asked casually about the safety of another parcel which she had lodged with the bank the same day.

“What was my surprise,” she was reported as saying, “when my manager replied that there was no trace of it to be found. Then,” continued the interview, “when I had explained that the parcel contained jewellery to the value of a quarter of a million belonging to Prince Grika, and was supposed to have been guarded by special detectives from Scotland Yard, I was told that, in spite of these, the parcel had disappeared as if by a miracle.

“Then,” I replied, “I’m not trusting the bank with my manuscripts for fear of more miracles, and calling for my chauffeur I withdrew my deed-box and had it taken back to my own house.” And the rest of the article was mostly devoted to the lady’s indignation at the whole affair.

Such at least were the main facts of the case, which, ever since his arrival, Sir Thomas Ladman was having poured into his ears by the three principal witnesses, with endless repetition of details, punctuated by explosions of indignation.

The whole four, in fact, were still closeted together in the Chief’s own room by the time that Leigh arrived upon the scene; but, though the young detective expected that he would have been instantly called for, to give some account of the precautions he had taken, and that he would find a message to that effect awaiting him at the door—to his surprise, this was not so.

Had the Chief suddenly gone back to his old, or, rather, his new mood?

Leigh felt more mystified than ever.

He even sent up a message to ask whether the Chief did not want to see him.

The answer was peremptory and in the negative, which stung Leigh to the quick.

He felt it his due; his colleagues sympathised with him; but the fact remained.

The jewels were not there, and he had been in charge not merely of their delivery into the bank manager's custody, but of the watch over the premises during the night.

No words of his could be more eloquent than the facts—and the facts were damning.

Had anyone but himself had the packing of the jewels Leigh would have thought the whole thing a plant; but they had practically never left his hands.

From the insignificant brown paper parcel in which they had left Claridge's so as to escape suspicion, Leigh had handled them personally and placed them himself in the small steel strong-box supplied by the bank. He had also taken the precaution of getting Mrs. Cranley Watson to seal it with her ring, in his presence, and at the bank yet another seal had been added by the manager; but the whole box had apparently been taken from the bank by the time the strong-room was inspected.

Ladman received him standing, his face turned towards the window, and looking out over the Embankment.

The Chief wore an anxious expression, and his lips appeared to be moving in a paroxysm of passion which

he was trying to control ; but for a few seconds he did not speak or even look round.

At last, swiftly circling round on his heel, his hands clasped behind his back, Ladman fixed Leigh with an expression the young detective had never yet seen upon the face of his beloved Chief.

It was severe almost to the point of hatred ; there was no other word for it—positive hatred.

“ So this is my reward for giving you the chance of getting back your prestige at the Yard, is it ? ” hissed Ladman.

Leigh accepting the unjust rebuke, and, at the same time carefully choosing his words, replied :

“ I can assure you, sir, that the jewels never left my possession from the moment I received them from the Prince’s own hands to the time I handed them in at the bank.”

“ So you tell me,” said the Chief, with a cynicism that obviously went beyond the bounds of logic.

“ I can also assure you, sir,” continued the young detective, “ that they were in the bank’s strong-room when I left there, for I saw them through the grill after the door was closed.”

“ Where they remained all night, I suppose ? ” said Ladman.

Leigh repeated the sentence to show he was not afraid of the insinuation.

“ Where I maintain they remained all night—for no one could have approached that strong-room from the street without doing so under my very eyes.”

“ But they had gone by the time Mrs. Cranley Watson arrived,” came what the Chief thought was the *reductio ad absurdum*.

"That, sir, is exactly what we want to establish," said Leigh. But Ladman either thought that the retort was intended as smart repartee or else it was raising the question of the veracity of the bank manager and the information which had been laid before him as Chief.

"You don't mean to tell me you suspect the manager of having stolen them, do you?" said Ladman. But Leigh stuck to his guns.

"I should like it to be established beyond all doubt that the small box was nowhere to be found when Mrs. Cranley Watson made her inquiry."

"But don't I tell you that this was the very reason she took away her own trunk. The manager took her down, for she, like yourself, did not seem to take his word for it, and it was nowhere to be seen," said Ladman, who by now seemed to have entirely lost control of himself.

"Look here, Leigh, I've risked my reputation to give you a second chance, and you've only succeeded in making a fool of yourself and throwing ridicule upon the Yard."

Again Leigh stood his ground.

"As you know, sir," he said softly, "there is nothing I would not do rather than that—but I think that if you refer to the present case it is still far too early to draw any conclusion." But it was obvious Ladman was in no mood for reasoning.

"No," he said, "I am not going to re-open these discussions. If only for the sake of appearance, I must do something in self-defence."

"If you think that, sir, I should be only too glad to sacrifice myself to that purpose." Then, almost

by a slip of the tongue, he started again, "But, on the facts——"

Immediately Leigh felt that he had gone just one phrase too far in his insistence upon a hearing, and this time Ladman was really in a paroxysm of rage.

"Look here, you young pup," he said, his face livid. "I've done more for you than for anyone at the Yard, and all I get for it is incompetence and insolence. If you were an older man I would say you were trying to step into my shoes."

Then a strange thing happened.

Ladman took a few steps forward, and Leigh, looking down at his feet, noticed what he had not noticed since the Chief's return.

The old military gait was gone ; the sinewy, spring-like pose—so characteristic of the old soldier—had given way to the lazy carelessness of the civilian stance—even the boots were larger, looser, to the point of slovenliness.

Ladman caught sight of Leigh's glance, and, to the young detective's amazement the Chief, pretending to limp, went back and sat down at his chair behind his desk, as if to hide a deformity.

"That will do, Leigh"—becoming suddenly cool by a supreme effort. "You'd better go before I lose my temper with you. Take a month's holiday if you like—or do anything you like—but don't come near the Yard if you don't want me to make your holiday a dismissal." And Leigh, almost ready to break down in tears, left the room. Another idol shattered—an idol with feet of clay.

Once alone, the crook laughed to himself. After

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all, a month would suffice to bring off the big coup. Better play the fellow off than make him an open enemy—unless perchance he should have suspected !

At this latter thought, a strange look of fear seemed to creep over the face of the victor, and the laugh died from his lips.

Unless perchance he should have suspected !

But a second later the bravery of the desperado cloaked the fear that now for the first time began to gnaw at the heart of the man who had captured Scotland Yard !

CHAPTER XIII

A Little Cat-Burglary

A WEAKER man than Dandy Leigh would have felt broken by such an interview with his Chief—yet Leigh did not feel broken !

Hitherto a certain innate courtesy had weakened his belief in himself ; now the sheer injustice of his last interview with Ladman completely restored his self-confidence. He was not the Ladman he had learnt to love and respect, but a Ladman he was beginning to distrust and hate.

A couple of days later—at the very height of the Porchester Square Scandal, when, according to the papers, clues had been discovered tracing the jewellery to Amsterdam via Paris by air—Leigh noticed in the social gossip column of one of the larger dailies that “ Mrs. Cranley Watson had been ordered a complete rest in the country, and accordingly had cancelled her social engagements and closed her house.”

Morecombe too had “ spotted ” the “ flitting of the dame,” as he put it, and came round hurriedly to draw Leigh’s attention to it.

“ What’s the betting it’s a blind ? ” said Morecombe.

“ That’s for us to find out, old sport,” said Leigh, “ and, personally, I am not averse to doing a little shadowing on my own.”

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"Shadowing be blowed," said the cockney. "I'm out for a little cat-burglary on my own."

"Good heavens, what on earth do you mean?" said Leigh. And Morecombe thereupon unfolded his plans.

The weather was typical early November, and as filthy as only London can be. A grey mist had driven pleasure seekers home early, and then it began to pour down steadily.

It was this that made it all the safer when Dandy Leigh and Morecombe approached the house of the famous Society explorer, from different sides of the square, completely disguised from head to foot, and carrying a couple of electric torches and a complete set of burgling tools.

"Everything safe, mate," asked the cockney, suiting the word to the action.

"All serene," replied the most un-Dandy-looking Leigh. "All the servants left this morning for the country."

"What of the cops?" continued Morecombe, thoroughly enjoying the impersonation.

"Old Murphy is safe for a couple of hours at least," replied Leigh, referring to the constable on duty.

"On with the rubber gloves then," said Morecombe. And within a couple of minutes anyone who had wanted to catch his death of cold during a perfect deluge of rain might have witnessed one of the smartest pieces of cat-burglary ever accomplished.

Mounting on Morecombe's shoulders, and from thence hoisting himself on to a ledge, Leigh was soon on the sheltered side of the mews wall.

A second later a silk ladder attached to a thin cord with a small weight came over the wall, being held taut on the inside while Leigh's accomplice climbed up beside him.

A pause, with a cat-like glance from side to side to make sure everything was safe, then a quick scramble up a drain-pipe, thence to the ledge of the dining-room window, a similar manœuvre by the second "pussyfoot" and the two pals were standing up under the shelter of the shutters—for it was an old-fashioned mansion.

These creaked a bit, but the rain and the distant barking of a dog only made anybody who was awake still more determined to get to sleep.

Lastly the old trick of a treacle-smeared piece of sackcloth neatly applied to the window glass, one thrust, and it was "open sesame"—and they were in.

"Gawd blimey if it ain't Dandy Leigh!" said the irrepressible cockney, with simulated fear, as the two gazed at each other in front of the dining-room fire—but Leigh stopped him.

"See that," he said, pointing to the stacked-up grate.

"How the rich live," continued Morecombe, who could not resist one more joke; but he soon saw its seriousness.

He pulled out from his pocket a copy of the evening paper, and pointed out the following from the "Chatterbox":

"I was chatting with Mrs. Cranley Watson at the Savoy yesterday, but I could not draw her on the subject of Prince Grika's jewels, as she said she was hurrying back to Porchester Square to pack,
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as they would all be leaving for the country in the morning—taking the servants with them. Poor dear, she seemed so upset about it, and it does seem hard lines, since she was only trying to do somebody a good turn.”

Leigh had already seen it, and he was wondering how it came about that, if this were so, the fire appeared to have been made up only an hour or so before.

“ I don’t like this, Morecombe, for it means that somebody is coming back to-night. If we want to have a look round, we shall have to look nippy.”

Leigh was already tolerably familiar with the house from his first interview with Mrs. Cranley Watson. Hence he knew that there would be “ nothing doing ” in the principal rooms ; and so he and Morecombe gave them a wide berth as useless.

Upon going downstairs, however, amidst the huge lumber and store rooms of the basement, things began to excite his curiosity.

Huge boxes from foreign destinations seemed scattered in numbers in every direction, all empty ; stacks of foreign periodicals, likewise from all parts of the world.

These rooms, thought Leigh, are in striking contrast to the orderliness of the rooms in which Mrs. Cranley Watson entertained Society people and interviewed the journalists who gave her the “ write ups.”

Why the duality, unless to deceive ?

A hurried look through the dustbin and waste-paper baskets contributed to their information. A couple of cheque-book counterfoils—both very new, though each fifty in number, indicated a very lavish expenditure.

Several broken jewel-box settings in blue plush, of which Leigh pocketed a couple. Then a strange assortment of old newspapers of no particular date or ostensible interest, yet all neatly folded—or had they merely been used for packing?

All these, needless to say, were of minor interest compared with the real object of his search, namely, the large American trunk, so filled with precious documents that it should have required the protection of Scotland Yard, or at least the safe-room of the Porchester Square bank!

Why was it not here?

Leigh and Morecombe even made a special journey to the topmost rooms, but in vain; then once again they made their way down to the basement, with the same result.

Yet from the reports at the Yard the trunk had been brought back direct the same morning.

Only two explanations could account for its disappearance. Either it had gone to the country, which could easily be ascertained, or else it had been destroyed on the premises!

This last explanation suddenly flashed across Leigh's mind as he remembered noting at the time that it was almost certainly composed of wood, unlike most boxes in which deeds are usually stored.

He went to the coal-cellar as the most likely place where it would have been chopped up; but just as he was opening the door there came the sound of a large motor, with a screech of brakes, stopping at the entrance in Porchester Square.

It was Morecombe who gave the alarm.

"Quick, mate, there's some of them coming back."

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There was certainly no time to lose, for the next instant there came the sound of the opening of the hall door.

"Put on your mask," said Dandy Leigh, with great presence of mind. "We may have to make a fight for it before we can get out."

Morecombe hurriedly slipped a black silk handkerchief over his eyes, while Leigh did the same.

They were only just in time, for a few seconds later they heard footsteps in the hall above them.

They were trapped !

It was impossible to escape through the basement and up the area steps, for they would have been caught long before they reached the street level, or, what would be worse, the alarm might be given, the whole square aroused, and a chase ensue through the streets in which they would not have an earthly chance of escape !

They listened, the door closed, and then—whether the newcomers had heard them or not, Leigh could not say—the footsteps came to a standstill.

Both "cat-burglars" held their breath in suspense, and as they did so they could hear the dull purr of the car outside.

Evidently the visitors did not intend to stop long, if visitors they were—but they might stop long enough to see the broken pane in the dining-room !

For fully a minute there was a tense silence, as if each party was trying to catch the other off its guard, and from this alone the two detectives realised that the footsteps above them belonged to men who were fully alive to their presence.

The kitchen stairs, Leigh had noted, with the irony of fate, were particularly creaky—which meant that

in any dash for liberty they must give their antagonists at least fifteen seconds notice of their intention.

They already had the advantage of being the upper dogs too, and Leigh signalled to Morecombe with his torch.

The cockney approached and put his ear close to Dandy Leigh's mouth, while the latter whispered under his breath :

"Get the pepper-pot and unscrew the lid."

A few seconds later the cockney came back with the "ammunition," but unfortunately giving the alarm at the same time.

A treacherous plate, which for some reason or other had been taking its support from the pepper-pot, slid through the darkness and crashed to the ground in fragments.

A quick movement of feet on the landing above told the detective at once that they had been discovered.

Luckily, however, as it turned out, this accident gave them the advantage of getting the defensive, for it led their opponents into the folly of attack.

Had the latter just kept at the head of the stairs, Leigh and Morecombe would have been caught as surely as rats in a trap ; but the noise attracted the late-comers, who, instead of acting with a margin of safety, plunged headlong into the fray.

With a clatter of boots and a volley of strange foreign oaths, two men in full evening dress came rushing down the kitchen stairs, the first holding an electric torch.

Quick as thought, Leigh dashed this from his hand with one blow, and, following up the surprise, threw half of the contents of the pepper-pot into the fellow's face, half-choking and half-blinding him.

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Meanwhile Morecombe, strong as a bull, lunged with a quick right and a quick left, laying the second antagonist out before he could realise what was happening.

The next thing he heard was Leigh saying.

"Quick, Morecombe, the car."

Luckily it was still purring, thus indicating, as they had expected, that the visitors had only called for a few moments.

To find out who they were, what was their business, or even what they looked like was out of the question !

Safety at any price. What they had witnessed was quite enough. Provided no one knew of their own identity, they could follow up the clues later.

Leigh looked out to right and left from the doorway.

It was still raining the proverbial cats and dogs, and the mist thick.

Stepping into the car and taking the wheel, he beckoned Morecombe to follow.

Then, putting the car into gear, the two "cat-burglars" disappeared in the direction of Wimbledon Common, where they stopped the car a little beyond the Windmill.

Here, leaving their "tools" in the Rolls Royce, they prepared to take leave of it, when their feet came across a strange-looking parcel on the floor.

It was a parcel of manuscripts, and this Leigh hastily put under his overcoat . . . and so to bed !

CHAPTER XIV

The Clues Join Up

DETECTIVE work is very much like range finding ; truth lies where the clues meet.

For a long time it is sheer guesswork, mere tentative ventures into the possible, then, sometimes by sheer force of logic, sometimes by sheer accident, the lines of thought begin to converge on the unknown quantity ; the rest is then only a matter of time and perseverance.

All this Dandy Leigh knew well. It had been part of his training under the real Sir Thomas Ladman, but, as we have seen, he had been working for weeks against every conceivable difficulty, with eyes blinkered and made blind ; though he little knew that it was all part of a deliberate plan to bring about his own personal downfall.

Hence his joy at the quiet of his Nelsonian determination to act on his own—for the manuscript which had fallen into his possession as a result of his and Morecombe's little escapade as a couple of " cat burglars " proved nothing less than the meeting of hitherto wholly distinct incidents.

It linked up the International Players, Heathfield of Chippendale, and Mrs. Cranley Watson, though it still left the new Chief, if not above suspicion, at least outside the great conspiracy ; for of this latter Leigh

was no longer in doubt from the very first moment he opened the mysterious packet they had found in the motor-car.

"At last we've got the link we wanted," said Leigh to Morecombe, as the two, breaking open the parcel, proceeded to lay out its contents.

Morecombe, however, appeared rather puzzled.

"Those are not the Prince's jewels—I thought that's what we were after," he said: but Leigh went on to explain.

"My dear Morecombe, these are worth ten times as much as the Grika heirlooms to us." But still the cockney failed to understand.

"All I can make out is there seems to be a lot of manuscripts, that have been sent by Professor Estankraft to Mrs. Cranley Watson."

"Note the address they come from," said the other.

"Chippendale."

"And we risked our blooming necks, to say nothing of our reputations as cat burglars, for this scrawl," said the irrepressible cockney. "Why, we can't even read it."

This was true. The manuscript was not, as far as they could make out, in any of the better known languages of Europe.

But it was not so much the MS. that had caught Leigh's attention; it was the set of maps which now fell out as he turned over the pages.

"Hello, what's this!" he said, picking them up from the floor.

The expression referred to something more than at first appeared; for, ordinary common or garden underground maps, as they looked to Morecombe, they

had all been gone over in coloured inks, with mysterious crosses and circles at different points, more especially junctions of roads and streets.

Leigh placed them alongside of each other.

They were all differently marked, each with a colour of its own and numbers, as if suggesting meeting-places, scattered over the various points. Lots Road, the back of Regent Street, and so forth.

"Good heavens! See they've marked all the power stations," said Leigh. And at once Morecombe, picking out another, added, "Crikey, and all the London gas-works."

The two men looked at each other in amazement.

"Local colour for his next play, no doubt," said the cockney, with a sly wink.

"Say, rather, for the last act of the present play," said Leigh.

"I would," replied Morecombe, "if I could only guess what they are playing at."

"That's what I'm going to find out, Morecombe," replied Leigh, and, turning, he paused for a moment.

"What's the matter?" said the other.

"I've just been thinking, Morecombe. Our little adventure of last night, ending in such a find as this, puts us rather in a difficulty."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, by rights this should go down to the Yard at once. At the same time, we should have to explain how we got hold of it, which might be awkward."

"I've got a plan," said the other.

"What is it?" replied Leigh.

"As far as our dramatic friends are concerned, the parcel is still lost."

"What then?"

"Why, if it has any value, they will set up a hue and cry about it. On the other hand, though, if it's a dangerous piece of incriminating evidence they may say nothing."

Leigh paused a moment to think. It was an argument that cut both ways.

"Yes. I quite see the difficulty; but I also see a way out," he went on.

"Yes?"

"Just take our cue from Mrs. Cranley Watson."

"Good!"

"You see," said Leigh, "whoever her mysterious visitors were, they obviously had the entrée to her house. If they were there for legitimate purposes, then they will soon inform the Yard of our mysterious visit."

"You think they will?" asked the cockney.

"Wait and see," said Dandy Leigh, and "wait and see" they did.

But for some mysterious reason this time no complaint was made by Mrs. Cranley Watson to Scotland Yard.

At least, no complaint was made officially, as the reader can no doubt guess, though the Chief got to know all about it, and was equally reticent himself.

Why?

That was exactly what Dandy Leigh wanted to find out, if he could do so without incriminating himself.

Meanwhile, however, he was most anxious to probe the mystery of the strange manuscript, which, though entitled "A Play by Estankraft" in English handwriting, looked anything but dramatic in form, however dramatic Leigh felt it to be in substance.

The maps, of course, spoke for themselves; they contained the key to that subterranean London on which its water and light and power and health depend—but there was no indication how or why they came to be found in the hands of a foreign professor.

The manuscripts, on the other hand, proved a puzzle with no visible cue on the surface.

Sending for a representative of one of the most famous translation bureaus in the City, Leigh laid the manuscript before him.

"I wonder," said the detective, "whether you could get a translation of these done for me, in the strictest confidence."

The representative of Flowerdew's looked at a sample sheet, written apparently without stops or capitals; nor were there divisions between the words.

He smiled.

"I think you may take it from me, Mr. Leigh," he said, "that, whatever they like to call these manuscripts, they are not plays, nor is the writing in any European language."

"Perhaps, then, they are in some Oriental tongue?" said Leigh.

Again the reply was in the negative.

"Then they can only be what, I confess, I rather suspected from the first," said Leigh. "Cryptograms."

"You are right, Mr. Leigh," replied the representative of Flowerdew's. "As it happens, cryptograms were my particular job during the war. I must have come across a good many unusual codes and ciphers, but never anything quite like this." And the two fell to examining it.

In most cases, of course, cipher can ultimately be transcribed by a system of averages, the letters most frequently used being known, the smaller words, such as articles and prepositions, being likewise recognisable with a little care ; but in this particular script this was impossible. For one reason there was one continuous flow of writing, and, secondly, there were, in addition to the ordinary alphabet, a host of what can only be described as hieroglyphics.

It would take time, therefore, and, unless the " key " were found, it might for ever remain a mystery.

Such, at least, was the discouraging report of the expert, and Leigh, pledging the man to secrecy, locked the thing away in a drawer of the private desk in his study.

Later he wondered if by any chance Grace Seaton would be able to throw any light on the matter. It might be as well to see her, at any rate. He wrote and begged that she would meet him, naming a time and a place in the Park.

Grace Seaton replied that she would be delighted to see him. When they did meet the first thing Leigh noticed was a decided change in the girl herself. She seemed to be nervous, worried and ill at ease.

" Why, my dear Miss Seaton, what on earth's the matter ? " he exclaimed. " You look as though you were frightened about something."

" In a way I am," confessed the girl. " It's hard for me to say exactly what it is I fear. It's at Chippendale—after I get back from the theatre at night."

" You return every night ? " said Leigh, somewhat surprised.

"Yes," said Grace. "They seem never to let me out of their sight. They still treat me as if I were a convent girl: Griggs as if I were some future possession; Estankraft as if I were part of his propaganda—but it is not this that I fear most."

"What is it, then?" said Leigh.

"As I was saying," continued the girl, "from the moment I get back to the moment I leave in the afternoon, I feel that the old place is no longer an Englishman's home, but as if it was a sort of international exchange and mart."

"Your uncle is entertaining the players?" ventured the detective.

"Who they are who come up, stay an hour or so, at most a night, sometimes only a few minutes, I cannot say; but there is a continuous flow of strangers."

"Have any people from the Yard been down of late?" said Leigh, wondering whether anyone had taken his place on the case, or whether the search for clues had been abandoned.

"No," replied Grace, "but I heard Uncle saying that, if the suspicions which seem in some quarters to have been levelled at him continue, he will have no option but to ask Sir Thomas Ladman to come down again to Chippendale just to show that everything is above board."

This was news indeed. Leigh allowed the girl to go on, hanging on every word.

"Everybody round seems to have changed towards us, too; and I think Uncle is feeling it, for he gets long spells of despondency——"

"Indeed!"

"Yes," continued Grace Seaton. "In fact, he has

had a wireless installed with which he can get almost any foreign station in the world."

"Does he not like the English programmes, then?" asked Leigh.

"Well," replied the girl, "well, no, from what he says, and of late he seems to have developed a passion for piano solos."

"Piano solos?" said Leigh, with an air of surprise.

"Yes," continued Grace Seaton. "His favourite is some Central European professor, though I can't for the life of me see why, for his touch is as mechanical as a pianola," repeated Grace, thinking that Leigh was not paying attention. And possibly Leigh may have given that appearance, as he often did, when, as a matter of fact, he was listening most attentively.

What prompted him to ask the next question Leigh probably did not know himself, for it slipped out as if in natural sequence like an ordinary deduction in the process of cross-examination.

"Do you hear anything else?"

The girl gave a sudden shudder, as if the detective had anticipated some secret thought which she had tried to hide from him.

Leigh noticed her start, and at once asked the reason.

"Why did you start like that when I put that question?"

"Oh," she replied, "because, to tell you the truth, I did not want to say anything of what I am sure must be fancy on my part."

"Then you do hear something strange at times."

"I fancy I do——" came the reply, once more accompanied by the same hesitation.

Leigh at once saw that there was something here

which was out of the ordinary—something which more than any other had cast its own terror over her soul.

Leigh pressed for an explanation. Girl-like, her timidity made her fear ridicule; but the young detective kept on.

"Oh, you must not mind," she said; "they are merely old convent fears, dreams, imaginary visions, voices—you know all the stories they put into one's head when one is at school."

Leigh continued to press for more explicit answers; the girl continued to evade his direct interrogations—and not without reason, since she already loved Leigh. But at last, when he made the truth, and nothing but the truth, a condition of their friendship, Grace Seaton consented, though it meant little less than a declaration of love.

"At night," she began, "when I lie awake and think of Auntie, and wonder whether I am fulfilling her wishes, I often think I hear noises about the place."

"What kind of noises?" asked Leigh.

"Strange moans as if somebody were in terrible agony."

Leigh hung upon her words; again she hesitated in her reply.

He could see that she was trying to keep something from him, and yet at the same time she was trying to reveal something, if only she could separate the two processes.

"Anything else? Please, oh please, do not keep anything from me," said Leigh, scenting danger.

There was pleading in his eyes—or was it love? The girl could resist no more, and in another second

Leigh was listening to the strangest of all the strange things he had heard during the past month of incredibilities.

"My nerves are a wreck," said Grace Seaton, "and it is probably due to this, or else some convent fear come back."

"Some convent fear?" asked Leigh. "What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, they told me I had a vocation to be a nun—and that unless I followed it I would never have any luck or any of the things—I—I care for."

Leigh at first felt inclined to laugh away this fear of some ghost, goblin, angel, or whatever it was the girl thought was haunting her, but he refrained, for he could now see that she did not believe her own explanation.

"Noises—voices—groans," he repeated.

"Yes," she replied, this time no longer trying to hedge. "I could swear at times in the middle of the night I hear cries for help; and one night they seemed more powerful than usual. I rushed out to wake Uncle, and he got up, and, going down to the lounge, explained that it must have been the wireless."

"Yes—and was it?"

"Well," continued the girl, "after a lot of tuning in, Uncle was able to get some distant station, but that was only a comic song, so he explained it must have been atmospherics."

"But does he not turn off the wireless at night?"

"No. He says he too can't sleep, and he has it on with a special switch at his bedside."

"Then that must be what you hear, child," said Leigh, breaking into a laugh, which he thought might, after all, be the best way to deal with the terrors of an

THE CLUES JOIN UP

overwrought girl, which was all that Grace Seaton was at heart, however wonderful she might appear to the world before the footlights ; but the child gave back no echoing laugh of childish confidence restored.

" No—no—no—no ! " she said. " I only wish I could think it was that, but it is not. Sometimes I've heard real talking, for Uncle has explained that he had stayed up late with guests."

" Yes, and, tell me, have you ever been able to distinguish any particular word or words either during the groans or the whispers ? "

Grace gave a nod of assent, then, with a tremendous effort, she looked at Leigh timorously and said :

" Yes, I have—your name."

Leigh felt a thrill of emotion course through his veins—but he could hardly make out whether it came from the heart or the brain.

Before he had even time to recover from the shock, the girl turned her beautiful face upon him and said :

" Tell me, tell me, just as truly as I have told you the truth—have you been in danger ? Is there any danger overhanging you ? I remember you promised to leave no stone unturned till you had avenged——" But she could say no more, and broke into tears.

Suddenly realising the full significance of the scene, she tried to recover her composure.

" Oh, I'm silly, I know ; it must, of course, all be imagination. Pray do not take any notice. But I had to tell you, to warn you, for fear something dreadful should happen."

" Something dreadful ? " said Leigh. " Oh, come, you must not worry about me, Grace—pardon, I mean

Miss Seaton. Our life is always more or less in our hands." And then, reassuringly, "I don't think it has been more in danger than comes to our lot in the ordinary course of our duties." And he was preparing to go into more detailed questionings concerning the strange happenings at Chippendale when suddenly Grace Seaton gave a start.

The next instant Leigh heard a rush in the direction of the shrubs, and was just in time to catch sight of what had looked like a couple of dark, ripe, glistening berries look at him, close, and disappear.

He rushed forward fearlessly, but, recollecting that he could only pursue the retreating figure by leaving Grace Seaton unprotected, he came back to where she was standing.

The girl, pale as ivory, was already in a state of collapse, leaning back on one of the benches.

"I knew we were being watched, I felt we would be watched, like I am always being watched wherever I go. I must leave you now. Put me into a taxi, if you like, but don't follow. It would be dangerous for you."

Then, as Leigh refused to be deterred, as she knew he would, she added, "and dangerous to me"—and poor Dandy Leigh was compelled to accede to her wish.

A couple of minutes later Leigh was standing alone by the lake at the Bayswater end of the Park, where the Serpentine ends in the sunken gardens, lost in a reverie.

To any passer-by, to the keepers, the children, and the nursemaids, and the old, withered veterans basking in the autumn of their own lives and the pale November sun, he looked like one of the peaceful

statues gazing at his own reflection in the placid waters between the water-lilies ; but in reality he was gazing alternately through two open portals, those of heaven and those of hell.

Paradise had opened wide the gates, in Grace's confession of solicitude ; while the danger which he was now convinced beset her night and day was as the torture of the damned.

Even yet, though she had promised to tell him the whole truth, he did not feel convinced that she had told him everything ; but she had told him more than enough to set him thinking in an entirely new direction.

CHAPTER XV

Suspicion

“**L**OOK here, Morecombe,” said Dandy Leigh, after he had made several vain attempts to unravel the mysterious manuscript, “I think I have a plan.”

“Good!” replied Morecombe. “I am glad to hear it. What is it?”

“To pretend to find this manuscript for Estankraft, and to hand it back to him with our compliments.”

“What!” exclaimed his companion in surprise. “Hand this back after all the trouble we had to get it?”

“Of course, before doing so we shall have it photographed in facsimile.”

“But why give it up at all?” protested Morecombe.

“Because at the moment it is of no use to us. The photograph will be as useful as the original, as far as solving what it is all about goes. Now, if we return it to Estankraft we shall allay any suspicion he has about us, and at the same time gain a certain amount of his confidence. We will hint to Estankraft that certain of his friends were responsible for its loss. We will sow suspicion in his heart that someone of his gang has tried to double-cross him. If I am not mistaken in Estankraft, that will be all that is necessary. Once he is convinced that someone

is double-crossing him, he will set to work to double-cross himself—and, my friend, ‘when rogues fall out ——.’ ” Leigh finished with a flourish of his hand.

“Damn me, Dandy, if it isn’t a bully idea,” said Morecombe. “We certainly must try it.”

And for the next hour the two men sat making their plans.

A message, through Morecombe, from Dandy Leigh to Grace Seaton, saying that Leigh was on the track of the missing manuscript gave all the appearance of good faith and served to throw Estankraft and the players off their guard.

The Professor was delighted, and accorded Morecombe a lengthy interview—which gave Grace a chance of reading a letter from Dandy Leigh alone.

In this the young detective explained that he had every reason to believe that the missing manuscript could be found, if only he could get access to the night club at which Griggs had been on the occasion of the supposed theft—that if she did this he could guarantee its production within a couple of days. But Leigh impressed upon her that his visit must be secret from Griggs, and, if possible, she should try to make Estankraft believe that her uncle’s chauffeur was in some way responsible.

This latter suggestion was with the deliberate purpose of sowing the seed of suspicion between the two confederates.

But, concluded the letter, apart from this, she was to do everything in her power to make him and Morecombe out to be fools, so as to facilitate their elucidation of the Chippendale mystery without suspicion.

Grace read the letter, and promptly burnt it in her dressing-room fire.

Morecombe, in the meanwhile, had conveyed the glad tidings of hope to Estankraft, who at once adopted an attitude of the most cringing servility.

How could he show his gratitude? What reward could he, a poor man, offer to that brilliant Mr. Dandy Leigh. In the name of Art, for Art's sake, and so forth, till it was all the cockney could do not to "plug the old bastard one under the jaw, as admirals say in the Navy"—as he afterwards reported the incident to Leigh.

But he proved himself a bit of an actor too, as he tried to dissuade Estankraft from too high an appreciation of his colleague.

"Of course, everyone gives Leigh the credit of everything," he complained bitterly, "just because he happens to be a gentleman; but where do I come in?"

Estankraft was rather unprepared for this.

"No understand. You, Mr. Leigh's servant—what—yes—no?"

This gave the cockney his chance.

"Not on your blinking life, Mr. Easterncraft," said Morecombe, chuckling to himself at his own humour. "I'm not a servant, though I am a cockney. I'm a plain man, just a plain poor man. Do you understand what I mean by that?" And he peered into the old rascal's face.

"Ah, yes, very goot!" said the Professor; "but you love Art for Art's sake—you help me find great masterpiece. No? Yes?"

"Look here," continued Morecombe, now confident

that the fellow was being taken in, "let's understand each other. I said I was a poor man."

"Poverty no crime, my goot man," said the other.

"No—it's not a crime; but it's not capital, either! What I want to know is, what's it going to mean to me if I find it, eh?"

"Very—very great honour," continued the Professor.

"I'm not out for honour, I'm out for the dibs—see!" And the cockney made the international crook sign by rubbing his index finger and thumb together, and the Professor consented to understand, while Morecombe still further rammed home his point.

"I'm tired of seeing this fellow Leigh get all the praise for the work I'm doing—fed up to the teeth, I am," he said, "and, since this matter is not going through the Yard, I don't see why I should not make my little bit, see?"

This time the Professor fell for it, and no mistake.

Morecombe soon saw that he could have demanded almost any price—had price been his object.

Instead, he astounded the Professor by his modesty. He would be more than satisfied with £50, especially since it was practically found already!

The Professor gave a grunt of astonishment, and Morecombe went on to explain.

"I don't say I know," he said, emphasising every word slowly so as the better to watch the effect upon the crook's face, "but I've strong suspicions—haven't you?"

A look of perplexed fear came over the Professor's face. There is nothing so terrible as an undefined danger.

How often had Morecombe and Leigh played the

old "Fly at once—everything is discovered" trick, and found it work satisfactorily. This was only another form of it, and the effect was magical.

"Got many friends in the country?" continued Morecombe.

"Very, very few," replied the Professor.

"Got any enemies?" added Morecombe, feeling like a K.C., with Estankraft already in the dock at the Old Bailey.

The foreigner, his furrowed brow giving the lie to his facile lips, replied with an emphatic negative.

"Well, then," said Morecombe, "I took you for a cuter man than you appear to be. I know better."

This appearance of definite knowledge put the old fellow off his guard, and panic was already beginning to get hold of him.

So this man knew that some of his friends were his enemies then, and at once the terrific importance of the lost manuscript came up before his eyes.

He must get it at all costs, for, if he could once get it back into his possession, they would have no evidence against him personally—at least, no conclusive evidence. If there was really going to be treachery at this stage, then the sooner he made his own position safe and became a simple professor again the better.

It was a mad scheme he had been dragged into, a scheme too vast to have any ultimate hope of success; sooner or later it must end in a *sauf qui peut*.

Why had he trusted Griggs, the man who, as they could all see, was only after the women, not the Cause.

This conclusion once reached in the panic-stricken foreigner's brain, the rest was easy.

Morecombe did not overdo it ; he left the seed of suspicion to do its own work ; and it did.

Within a few minutes the wily cockney was leaving the theatre with a written promise that Professor Estankraft would pay him fifty pounds if the missing manuscript were found within eight days, and a verbal assurance that the detective would get notice of the next intended visit of Vernon Heathfield's gay chauffeur into the night haunts of London . . . anything to get the missing manuscript back into his hands.

Then, as the door closed on Morecombe, the old ruffian burst into cynical laughter.

They thought they could double-cross him, did they ? Let them try—Griggs and his gang !

CHAPTER XVI

A Night Club Raid

IT was gala night at the Rag and Bone Club, and Bohemia had invited Mayfair to revelry. Fancy costumes were the order of the evening.

Leigh and Morecombe had secured invitations through Estankraft by the simple process of hinting to him that they were hot on the scent of the missing manuscript, and that they believed that the persons who had stolen it would be present at the Rag and Bone Club that evening.

As a couple of Circus Clowns a little the worse for drink, Leigh prided himself that their costumes filled the occasion admirably, whilst the make-up for clowns was an effective disguise from suspicious eyes.

They had not been in the club long before they spotted a little group to whom it appeared the frivolities of the evening had no charm. Joey and Pantaloon (Leigh and Morecombe) became curious. They knew they must be careful if they were going to overhear what it was that little group found of such interest to talk about.

They picked up with a couple of models—a dance, then drinks, and the two detectives managed to pick a table near enough that little group for the purpose of eavesdropping.

The models ordered cocktails for themselves, but

quite frankly endorsed Leigh and Morecombe's determination to drink coffee.

The conversation behind them therefore took a more confident tone.

"Go on, it's all right," said a voice with which Leigh thought he was familiar. "They are only a couple of drunken fools. I wonder they let these old pros. into a club like this—but go on."

"Well," said the voice of a woman, "I don't mind telling you I'm tired of your promises. You talk in millions, and all I've seen of your wealth is a couple of miserable earrings."

Joey made a grimace with his mouth which almost reached to the back of his neck, and sent the two models into fits of laughter, but Pantaloon just said: "Aye, aye, Captain," by which Morecombe conveyed to Leigh that he was fully aware of the significance of the conversation, which continued.

"Anyway," came the first voice again, "it shows you that I am in earnest and that I can get the stuff, doesn't it?"

"Perhaps. But what's the use of giving me jewels if I cannot wear them?"

"I will give you better ones by the score."

"But I tell you, it's those you gave me I want to wear."

"Well, so you will—some day," said the man. And the woman, with all a woman's petulance, replied:

"I don't want any 'some day.' It's to-day, with this dress, now!"

"Don't be a fool."

"I'm not a fool, but I'm not a coward, either."

"Who's a coward?" continued the man, this time thoroughly piqued.

"You are, since you're afraid to let me wear them."

Joey and Pantaloon sent facial messages across to each other which would have sent the two little models into a fit of hysterics had they been able to understand the thoughts behind them.

For the voice was no other than that of Griggs, Heathfield's chauffeur.

Another couple of seconds and the conversation behind them had developed into a quarrel.

The woman, a tall, olive-complexioned belle of the Spanish type, and appropriately dressed as Carmen, was unconsciously, or consciously, playing the part.

"Then, if you're not afraid, I am not afraid."

Again Leigh could hear the voice of Griggs pleading in terror-stricken accents: "No, no. I beg of you!" But to no purport. He then tried—fatal mistake—physically to prevent the woman from carrying out her threat, which immediately turned his action into a challenge.

With a magnificent sweeping gesture she thrust his arm aside, and, a moment later, was affixing two priceless old-world earrings on to her delicate, shell-like ears.

The two models, who had witnessed the incident, broke into expressions of admiration.

"Oh, ain't they lovely! Look, Joey, look!"

The clowns turned their silly faces in the direction of the masked figures.

Even as they did so Leigh could see Griggs's face suddenly become an ashen hue, but to restore the fellow's confidence Morecombe continued clowning.

"La Signora Woolworth," said the cockney, and, getting up, he blew Carmen a kiss, and, with a low bow,

equally cavalier, he resumed his place beside Pantaloon and the two models.

It was a master-stroke of quick thinking. The anger at once changed to a smile ; the terror into a restoring of confidence.

Whatever their relations, and the conversation indicated they were pretty incriminating, Griggs, in the complementary character of a Spanish toreador, could not allow himself to be terrified by a couple of clowns in motley—especially when Joey, putting his fingers up beside his head, made pretence of being a “ toro.”

The woman meanwhile, conscious of her victory before witnesses, gave him a look of contemptuous triumph. After all, who on earth would see them in a hole like that ? And the couple settled down to the merriment of the evening again ; the while the two detectives made an excuse to leave their genial little partners and hold counsel about more serious things.

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It would have been the easiest thing in the world to have telephoned up the Yard immediately, told them to send round a couple of plain-clothes men, or even uniformed police, and, surrounding the place, arrest Griggs and Carmen on the charge of theft of the missing Heathfield earrings.

But the two detectives had not forgotten that they had come upon another mission. It was, moreover, too good an opportunity of getting still more incriminating evidence to spoil it by instant arrest.

The evening was still young, the fun only just starting ; in another hour or so the theatres would be releasing the players and singers, who were coming to add to the gaiety—and Estankraft would come along.

Besides, Griggs by this time was beginning to drink. Fully conscious that he had committed a blunder, in addition to suffering a defeat, the chauffeur was trying to forget, and lose himself in drink.

The woman, as luck would have it, was following up her victory by still further taunts of cowardice, and these taunts took the shape of being "unable to drink."

The age-old motto, "*In vino veritas*," came up before Leigh's mind.

Taking Morecombe aside, Dandy Leigh explained his plan of campaign.

"Look here, Morecombe," he said, "It's my belief that we've had the greatest stroke of luck in our lives, but we must not spoil it by over-haste. At the same time, we must act with caution. At the rate Griggs is drinking he'll be in his cups, 'broadcasting' within the hour, and we'll learn more in five minutes than we can hope to in a month any other way."

Morecombe was not quite of the same opinion.

"Well, if you ask me," said he, "I think a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, while a gaol-bird in the handcuffs is worth ten in his cups."

"There's only one thing to be done," said Leigh. "You must go round to Vine Street and 'phone up the Yard. It will be too late to get in touch with the Chief, but get in touch with the head on duty, and say we're out to track one of the most important clues in the Chippendale murder mystery."

Morecombe, remembering the last words of Sir Thomas Ladman, was anything but optimistic.

"Do you think there is any chance of there being any orders to 'snag' us?"

Leigh thought a minute. He, too, remembered they were in disgrace—a point he had almost forgotten in his eagerness to clinch matters.

"I know what you mean, Morecombe, but we've got to take that risk. It's now or never. We've got Griggs red-handed, if we don't let him slip through our fingers; but we need help. It would be folly in a place like this, dressed as we are, to bank on any support. They would either take it as a huge joke——"

"Which we would do ourselves if we were in their place," commented his colleague.

"Exactly," agreed Leigh. "While if, on the other hand, they took us seriously, with the confederates that are no doubt scattered among the guests, we should not have an earthly chance of escape."

"And frighten our quarry into the bargain," said the other.

"Well, then," said Leigh, "the only thing to do is for you to get the place raided for some reason or other—liquor after hours, if you like. But we must get the names and addresses of everybody here. Meanwhile, I'll do my best to get Griggs to compromise himself still further."

"What about the old Professor's manuscript, though?"

"I was coming to that," added Leigh. "I've got the plan for that all right. It came to me just as the two were quarrelling."

"Yes?"

"Their quarrel was the very thing we wanted. Evidently it goes deeper than it appears. That woman is not the type that Griggs is after: especially if, as Grace tells me, he is after her money."

The Cardinal looked anxious, and he could see him going from one to another, making inquiries of the guests. Leigh could guess what those inquiries were, and the negatives with which they were repeatedly met assured him that no one had pierced through his disguise.

Not one of them had seen anybody even remotely looking like a detective !

But the negative was not always as polite as one might have expected, considering the anxiety of an old gentleman for a missing manuscript of priceless literary value.

As to the Toreador, he was positively rude, and, but for the intervention of Carmen, the Professor might have been struck, which sent another thrill through the sensitive nerves of the detective.

Suddenly someone uttered the word, " Police ! " —then, " Raid " ; and the next instant the men from the Yard, led by Morecombe, were in upon them.

CHAPTER XVII

“There’s Many a Slip”

FOR a few moments there was consternation at the raid, for, unlike so many clubs, its purpose was not primarily for profit.

The secretary was indignant at the prank which had been played to extend the drinking hours, and hastened to explain the situation. A few words from Morecombe, however, soon put him at his ease.

“We’re very sorry to have to disturb you, sir, but orders is orders, and our orders are to confine our investigations to one or two people.” The latter in a whisper.

“Technically the charge may be that of selling intoxicating liquors after prohibited hours, but we have reason to believe that stolen property is in the possession of some people present here.”

“Stolen property!” exclaimed the genial secretary. “What do you take the place for? I’ve never heard of such a thing! This is no ordinary night club.”

But the detective reassured him.

“I quite understand, sir,” said Morecombe. “But, as some of our men took the liberty of ascertaining the fact first, if you will allow us to do our duty there need be no scandal.”

The secretary succumbed to the inevitable, and people were asked for their names and addresses,

which they gave. Then, when order had been restored, Leigh found himself called down to speak to the inspector. A couple of seconds later another message came for Carmen and the Toreador, another few seconds, and "Cardinal" Estankraft.

The scene which ensued in the secretary's private office must have presented a strange picture. Griggs and Carmen, both of them white with suppressed emotion, flashed lightnings from their angry eyes. Estankraft, also deathly pale, was, on the contrary, icy cold, but his eyes shot deathlike hatred at the chauffeur.

It was the latter who broke the silence as soon as the inspector closed the door, which Morecombe guarded to prevent escape.

"What the hell is the meaning of this?" asked Griggs.

"One minute, sir," answered the inspector severely.

"I think you gave the name of Smith. Am I right?"

"Yes," said the chauffeur, lying.

"And the lady?" continued the inspector, looking through the list of names in his notebook.

"Dolores Pimbury," replied the woman, who by this time had removed the tell-tale earrings, which she thought she had very cleverly put away in her bag while the inspector was not looking.

At this point Morecombe stepped forward.

"In the first place," he said, "I should like to ask Miss Pimbury if she has any knowledge of a manuscript belonging to Professor Estankraft."

The girl burst out laughing, as did Griggs, who for the moment felt somewhat reassured.

"Good heavens, what perfect nonsense!" said the latter, "of course we do not!"

“ I said ‘ Miss Pimbury,’ ” corrected Morecombe, whereupon the woman endorsed the negative.

Estankraft, remembering Morecombe’s promise, already scented the return of his lost treasure. But he did not seem to be quite certain whether it would emanate from the mysterious Joey’s pockets, or from the woman whom Griggs had brought along with him.

It puzzled him, and the mystery seemed to add to his hatred. What were they getting at? Had the secret of its contents by any chance reached the police? For, if so, he knew they were lost.

“ You are quite certain, madame, that you know nothing of its whereabouts? ” repeated the inspector.

“ Quite.”

A couple of seconds later a tall policeman was bringing in the precious parcel.

“ The attendant in the cloakroom,” he said, “ has just found this, if it is what the Professor is looking for.”

The Professor trembled from head to foot as he seized the documents. His lips seemed frozen, his mind paralysed between the alternatives of gratitude at their recovery and indignation at their being found where they had been—in the possession of the woman dressed as Carmen. But it was upon Griggs that the storm of his anger fell.

“ This is your doing, you thief! ” he said, before he could control either his temper or his accent.

Joey gave a huge grin, but Morecombe came to the rescue.

“ Come, come, Professor, that is rather a serious charge, is it not? ”

Estankraft, however, was in no mood for control,

though he had sufficiently regained his presence of mind to get back to broken English.

"I do not care. . . . Mine precious masterpiece. Griggs swear he not know where."

"Griggs, did you say?" asked the inspector, picking up the Cardinal.

"Vell, whatever is the name of him," said Estankraft.

The inspector turned to the Toreador, at the same time running his finger down the list of names in his notebook.

"I thought you said your name was Smith, sir. Perhaps I made an error?"

The chauffeur saw his mistake.

"Did I?" he inquired, trying to gain time for thought, but it also gave the inspector time for thought, Leigh not betraying his identity for the moment.

The two crooks exchanged glances full of significance: a sort of visual duel for the mastery, but the foreigner must have seen something in the Englishman's eye that made him surrender, for he at once came out with a blundering attempt to right matters.

"Oh, yes, the mistake is on me, Mr. Policeman. The disguisement make me think of my friend Smith."

"Then you do not know this gentleman?" asked Morecombe.

"No, no, no, no—yes, yes, yes, yes. No sure. No sure, no sure, no sure," said the helpless foreigner, not knowing what to say.

Unfortunately for himself he had already said too much, for the next instant the inspector, taking his cue from Morecombe, said:

"I'm very sorry, gentlemen, but, as there seems to

be some difference of opinion upon the matter, I think you had better come along with me.”

“I protest,” said Griggs, now thoroughly roused to his danger. “The damned foreigner is mad—always has been.”

“That we can find out later,” said the inspector, with an unconscious touch of humour. But still Griggs protested on.

“I want to know here and now,” he said vigorously, “whether I’m accused of stealing his manuscript or not.” And he shot a murderous look at Estankraft, who almost screamed :

“Never, never, never ! Oh, very much mistake ! ”

But by this time the police had seen through the little drama of equivocation.

“The lady, at least, can go free,” said Griggs, “if it is I who am supposed to be charged with the theft of this bundle of nonsense.”

The inspector hesitated, and, from the look on Griggs’s face, Leigh could see the tack he was taking.

Once get the girl out of the way with the fatal earrings, and the rest of the tiff could easily be explained away—thieves have a way of hanging together.

Carmen made a superb move towards the door with all the defiance of her operatic namesake, but just at this moment Joey made a signal to Morecombe.

“Half a minute,” he said. “There is another charge against this lady.”

“What the hell do you want, butting in, you drunken clown ? ” asked the Toreador. “Inspector, I protest against the whole farce. It’s a put-up job. I believe the fellow is a blackmailer.”

The inspector, human at last now that their quarry

had thoroughly enmeshed themselves in their own lies, smiled divinely, and said :

" Of course, sir, if you care to bring a charge of blackmail against Inspector Dandy Leigh of Scotland Yard, that is your affair. Perhaps you will tell me in what name you would sign it."

The fat was now in the fire, but the quick-witted partner of the arch-crook was not going to run her neck into the noose without one last chance to get rid of the incriminating evidence she had so foolishly insisted upon displaying in public, in spite of Griggs's repeated warnings.

" I wish, first of all, to see the cloakroom attendant. I give you my word of honour I will not try to escape."

The request was reasonable, and for a second it seemed as if the inspector would grant it, for he said :

" You have no objection, I suppose, Mr. Leigh ? "

It was the clown's hour of triumph, the moment when he felt he could re-establish himself in the eyes of his colleagues, and win back his way to the confidence of Scotland Yard.

" Most certainly not," he said in his politest manner. Then, just as the inspector was opening the door and the Toreador was about to draw a long breath of relief, he added :

" But perhaps first Mademoiselle Dolores Pimbury will allow me to take charge of the famous jewels which have been missing since the death of Mrs. Heathfield of Chippendale Manor. They are in her bag ! "

The events that followed in the next hour were some of the most exciting that both Leigh and Morecombe

had ever experienced ; but the excitement was of a very different kind from that which they had anticipated.

The discovery of the famous Heathfield jewels under such strange circumstances had led them to hope that they now possessed the first link in a chain that would eventually lead them to the final solution of the Chippendale murder mystery.

Once again, however, they were destined to be disappointed.

Taking a taxi and arriving at Vine Street a few minutes before the others, who were told to accompany the inspector and plain-clothes men on foot, Leigh’s first act was to take off the motley.

His second was to telephone the Yard and prepare them for his great “scoop,” and a few minutes later the night “head” came over in person. But from the first moment the question of a formal charge came up it was evident that there were going to be difficulties.

An oversight on the part of the inspector in charge of the raid had allowed the three suspects to walk to the station together. It was a natural mistake to make in view of everything, but more especially in view of the belief that the Toreador could not speak the language of the Cardinal.

As a matter of fact, he could, and, to their surprise, did, so that the formal warning that anything they might say would be “taken down and used in evidence against” them was perfectly futile.

Hence, by the time they had arrived at Vine Street, the Professor had already arranged to withdraw the charge of theft, which, as a matter of fact, Leigh had

"My position is perfectly clear," replied the other. "Mr. Heathfield, my master, gave them to me."

"When?" came Leigh's lightning question, which Griggs had answered before he had had time to realise the trap.

"Last week."

"Then, if they have been found all this time, there will no doubt be some record of that fact at the Yard," said the inspector.

It was the simplest thing in the world to ring up and verify this hypothesis.

The answer came back almost immediately that no trace had yet been found of them.

"Ask Sir Thomas Ladman," said the chauffeur, not at all disturbed by this verdict.

Leigh was anxious to put the matter to an instant test, as well for its own sake as for his own; for such a discovery would undoubtedly tend to re-establish him in the eyes of the Chief, and he asked if he might use the telephone.

The chauffeur seemed a little disconcerted at this.

"Surely you cannot get Sir Thomas Ladman out of bed for this," he said. "He might not even be at home. Mr. Heathfield is surely the natural witness."

Something in the phrase rang false to Dandy Leigh's ear.

Sir Thomas Ladman not at home! At four o'clock in the morning! The man whose whole life was regulated with the precision of a railway time-table! Impossible!

The unequivocal form of the challenge, however, to say nothing of the importance of the point raised, made it almost impossible to avoid.

Leigh asked that the proceedings should be held up while he spoke to the Chief himself.

For a long while he heard the familiar mechanical call ringing, but received no answer. This was rather strange, for the Chief was, he knew well, a light sleeper, and his instrument was always at his bedside.

He had often got through before in well under a minute; in fact, the Chief was always most grateful at being personally consulted at any hour of the night on anything of more than ordinary importance.

At last Leigh heard a voice. It was that of Goodbrook, the butler. Instantly the old servant recognised the voice of the young detective, when, by a strange coincidence, both asked the same question at once:

"Where is Sir Thomas?"

Explanations followed. Leigh explained that he was ringing up from Vine Street on a most important matter. Goodbrook replied that the Chief had not yet come home, and asked whether Leigh had seen him. The butler added that he was particularly anxious, "as the master don't seem to be at all himself since he come back. In fact," added Goodbrook, "I'd take it as a great favour, sir, if you could come out some day, as there's several things I'd like to ask you about. But come soon, for it seems like as if he was anxious to get rid of me—after thirty years' service, without so much as a hard word, too. It fair breaks my heart. Everything I seem to do of late is wrong, and the more I tries to help the more he says I get in the way. But he's never been so late before."

Cold beads of perspiration gathered on Dandy Leigh's brow as he replaced the receiver.

He knew they were after Ladman. Had not the

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Chief said so himself? There was that accident in Switzerland. That had evidently miscarried, and they had determined to make sure this time.

The inspector saw Dandy Leigh was flurried as he came back.

"Anything wrong, sir?" said the official.

"The man was right," said Leigh, giving Griggs a look square in the face. "Sir Thomas Ladman is not at Winmore."

The chauffeur did not move a muscle; but the keen eyes of the detective could see that this was only due to a supreme act of self-control.

How had the fellow known? And, if he had not known, why had he not prided himself on the correctness of his guess?

The Vine Street official turned to Griggs.

"I'm afraid, sir, that means that we shall have to detain you. Mr. Heathfield is even now not on the telephone at Chippendale." And Leigh's mind went back to the terrible tragedy which had resulted from this omission only a few weeks back. Surely that should have taught the great financier wisdom, but apparently it had not.

"Mr. Vernon Heathfield may be stopping in town," said Griggs.

"In that case we can 'phone through to him."

"No, he is not on the 'phone, but," added Griggs, "if you are not detaining Professor Estankraft, I think perhaps he would not mind going round. Otherwise I suppose it would mean a Press scandal if we cannot get him to testify to this gift."

"Yes. I'm afraid it can hardly be kept out of the papers. It is a serious charge, with *prima facie* evidence

of guilt, but perhaps we can send somebody,” said the inspector.

Griggs, however, would not hear of this. It would upset his host, and look bad, and so forth.

Leigh suggested that a plain-clothes man should accompany Estankraft, but there was no technical reason which could force one upon him against his will. The Professor, on the other hand, explained that he had had enough of policemen for a year, and threatened to refuse to go, except alone.

Consequently the inspector was now forced to give his promise ; but the promise could not, of course, bind Morecombe, who, at a glance from Leigh, asked if he might go too, as he was tired, and, as far as he was concerned, his job was over.

Morecombe, with a clever sigh of disappointment and an ejaculation of resignation, went off into the night. Five minutes later Professor Estankraft followed too, as he thought. But, five minutes after that, Estankraft’s taxi was only about ten yards ahead of another taxi, which, all unknown to the ruffian, had orders to drop Morecombe only after the first had dismissed its fare, and he himself was about a hundred yards further on.

A quarter of an hour later Morecombe found himself on the other side of Porchester Square to that in which Mrs. Cranley Watson’s town house was situated.

Some few minutes later he was able to see, from his crouching position inside the shrubbery in the gardens, the figure of Heathfield emerge, accompanied by Estankraft, both looking ashen pale.

He saw them walk for a hundred yards or so, and then turn towards a taxi-rank not far from the local

police station, and, following, was just in time to hear them give the address: "Scotland Yard." Then, going into the police station himself, Morecombe got on to the telephone to Vine Street, and gave Leigh the result of his investigation.

At the very same moment another figure emerged from the same house in Porchester Terrace, and, had Morecombe been near enough, he might have heard the order given to the taxi driver:

"Winmore, Wimbledon."

For Leigh, a little too anxious to put a theory of his to the test, had rung through from Vine Street to the number opposite Mrs. Cranley Watson's name in the telephone directory to ask if Mr. Vernon Heathfield had, by any chance, been staying there the night, and the reply had been an astounded negative, in a voice which, but for the impossibility of the supposition, sounded remarkably like that of Sir Thomas Ladman.

Between them, comparing notes later, Morecombe and Leigh realised they had discovered another lie to the score of the crooks, but unfortunately they had missed the great truth which had been so nearly within their grasp.

It was of little avail, therefore, for Leigh to raise the point whether Heathfield had come from one place or from another, when, present in person, the financier was able to affirm that the jewels in question had been presented to his faithful chauffeur.

The charge crashed instantly to the ground, but that was not the worst part of the disaster.

Some twenty minutes later a telephone message came through from Winmore, Wimbledon. It was Goodbrook, asking on behalf of Sir Thomas Ladman

whether the telephone message received about an hour before was anything important.

Leigh, who with his Vine Street colleagues, was still chatting over the unsatisfactory conclusion of the incident, was called to the instrument.

Sir Thomas Ladman was speaking, and Dandy Leigh prepared to give the facts of the case, when the Chief cut him short.

"Look here, Leigh, I'm perfectly sick of your bungling! I took you off the Chippendale case because of your incompetence. If you had been on it still you would have known that Heathfield had reported the discovery a week ago."

The voice was angry—hardly Ladman's voice at all, in fact—but this time, too, Leigh felt angry, though he did not allow it to interfere with the perfect self-control he always possessed.

"I had no option, sir," was his dignified reply, "when I went to the trouble of 'phoning up the Yard, and found that there was no record of the fact in the Recovered Property Department.

Then Sir Thomas Ladman made use of a phrase which sent an electric thrill down Dandy Leigh's every fibre.

He just said :

"I forgot!" Two simple words, which, in the mouth of anybody else, Leigh would not have noticed. But there were two things about them in the mouth of Sir Thomas Ladman.

In the first place, it was a motto at the Yard that "Ladman never forgot," as well as a point of discipline never to plead forgetfulness as an excuse under pain of dismissal. In the second place, it was the code

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word which, with a certain touch of humour, the Chief had agreed upon with Leigh should be the key to the great safe in which reposed the coveted dossier of information which would soon rid Europe of the greatest crook conspiracy in history.

What on earth did Ladman mean?

CHAPTER XVIII

Greek Meets Greek

IN spite of the advantages which his position as Chief Commissioner of Police gave the new Sir Thomas Ladman, he did not find his work as easy as he had anticipated.

Orders received from his masters to delay active steps in the matter of the secret archives got on his nerves. Personally he wanted to be finished with the job as quickly as possible, for, truth to tell, he was beginning to feel not a little nervous. Something might happen at any moment to give him away!

Leigh had the code word which opened the safe. That code word he must at all costs get Dandy Leigh to disclose. They were not on friendly terms; something must be done. What? Much as he disliked the idea, he felt he had better send for Leigh and pretend to make up the breach, and then, by pretending he had forgotten himself, get Leigh to disclose the word. Once get that, and Dandy Leigh would have served his purpose. He would then have to be got rid of.

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Had Sir Thomas Ladman been less eager to effect his reconciliation with Dandy Leigh, the latter's suspicions would not have been aroused, but from the

very outset the crook tried to behave as if nothing had happened to estrange them.

"Ah, I'm glad you looked me up, Leigh," he said, extending his left hand. "As a matter of fact, I have wanted to see you for some days."

Leigh felt himself instinctively on his guard again ; for, psychologically, Gerolstein had made two fundamental mistakes. The real Chief never behaved as if nothing had happened. To him it was only another form of duplicity. His manner was always a mirror of his mind. In the same way, Ladman always acted on the moment, and never put off till to-morrow what he could do that day. Besides, Leigh was on the telephone, and a word of explanation, after the events which took place that night at the Rag and Bone, would not have been out of place after such a censure as he had allowed himself to give to his young subordinate for what was, after all, only doing his duty.

"As a matter of fact, sir," said Leigh, "I understood you did not wish me to go near the Yard until further orders."

"Oh, but I was not speaking so literally as all that," said Ladman—which once again rang false to Dandy Leigh's ear.

"I thought, too," continued the young detective, "that, after the other night——"

But Ladman took him up.

"You mean about that manuscript of Estankraft's you found ?"

"Morecombe found, you mean, sir, though I helped him ; and, as a matter of fact, I accompanied him." replied Dandy Leigh.

"Oh—I forgot," said the Chief.

Again the two words came like a thunderclap, but this time, as it were, with a louder peal than the time before. For Dandy Leigh had made the correction with a purpose, to test just how much of their adventure had reached the ears of the Chief. His very correction was not even accurate, yet the Chief had accepted it, and once more put it down to his memory.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Leigh, hardly believing his own ears.

"I said I forgot, Dandy. I forgot. I forgot, man alive! anyone is liable to forget!" replied Sir Thomas Ladman.

"Excuse me, sir," continued Leigh, "but it's a phrase I've never heard you use in your life like that."

This time the Chief seemed to be on his guard. He appeared to be trying to avoid a direct look into his eyes from Leigh. He drew up his legs, crossed his feet, and then seemed eager to bury his boots under his chair.

"You mean," said Sir Thomas Ladman, with a strange desire to apologise, "that I ought to have notified the Yard about the recovery of those jewels of Mrs. Heathfield's?"

Leigh nodded, while the Chief, still apparently anxious to justify himself, continued:

"Yes, I know I should. It put you in a false position. I can see it now, but—I forgot."

Leigh did not speak. The decision came to him like a flash. Perhaps something in his eyes betrayed his thoughts, for the next moment he saw a frown coming over the crook's face.

He, too, seemed to be hesitating, and for a second Leigh thought that Ladman thought he was accusing

him of a deliberate lie ; but of this latter he soon felt himself acquitted, for Sir Thomas Ladman went on :

" To tell you the truth, Dandy, since my accident I find my memory has been playing tricks with me. Quite a lot of things escape me."

" Indeed, sir ? I'm sorry to hear that," said Leigh sympathetically, at which Ladman broke into a strange falsetto kind of laugh—at least, it was a laugh such as he had never heard from the Chief before.

" *Anno Domini*, I suppose," the crook went on. " The warning that we old ones must think of making room for younger men waiting to step into our shoes." But the latter phrase seemed to have been a slip of the tongue.

Leigh was again dumb with amazement, but there was a greater surprise in store for him, for the next instant Sir Thomas Ladman had made the fatal error of referring to the famous dossier in the same laughing manner.

" Why, would you believe it, Dandy," he said. " I was on the point of dismissing you from the force without first getting the code word from you."

" What code word ? " said Leigh, but this time giving him an icy stare straight between the eyes.

" Oh, you know. The code word. The one that opens the safe in which we have stored the dossier of our investigations in preparation for the League of Nations."

There was a strange trembling of his lips and quiver in his eyes as the Chief tried to laugh at his loss of memory.

" Fancy ! I've even forgotten that ! " continued the Chief almost hysterically. " So, you see, your little

trouble was quite a trifle compared with that." Then, after a pause, he said: "As a matter of fact, that is why I wanted to see you—just to refresh my memory. What was it, again? You know—— It's just on the tip of my tongue."

Leigh, obeying orders literally, even in spite of his growing doubts, replied with the missing formula:

"I forgot."

What happened in the next few minutes Leigh could never quite make out. Sir Thomas Ladman had suddenly blazed into fury in a manner which made Leigh doubt his very sanity.

"I'll teach you manners, you insubordinate pup!" said the angry crook. "After all I've done for you, to make fun of me just because of my accident! I suppose you'll use that to try and get promotion! Think you're going to slip into my shoes some day, don't you?"

Leigh remained perfectly calm, yet, in spite of his calmness, he found his lips speaking his subconscious thought. Before he had realised it, in fact, his ears were telling him of his slip as he heard himself say, in spite of himself:

"I do not think we take the same size in footwear now, do we?"

It was sheer insolence on his part, as he had to admit, yet somehow the phrase seemed to have had a deeper significance.

Sir Thomas Ladman was now livid with rage.

"Look here, out you go!" he said. "If you think I'll stand for this, you're jolly well mistaken! I'll

report you to the Home Secretary." Then, suddenly calming himself, the crook changed his tone.

A new thought had just crossed his mind. He could only betray his identity by continuing in that vein—or, what was worse, raise the question of his own fitness for the position he occupied—if Leigh spoke, say, to the Assistant Commissioner. He would be sent away on sick-leave, and their whole plans crash to pieces.

"No, no. You must forgive me," he said. "Naturally you refused to tell."

Leigh began to see daylight, for he had not refused, if Sir Thomas Ladman had only realised it.

Something terrible was wrong. He looked at the boots again, at the long hair circling over the ears, at the right arm still in the sling, and the writing fingers, and the tell-tale thumb, still swathed in bandages. But his mind could not vault to the seemingly impossible conclusion to which all these things pointed.

He must get more proof; time to think; consult with higher authorities. It was all so absurd! Had he even heard aright? He would venture a simple test.

"If this is a dismissal, sir," he said proudly, "I accept it, or, if you like, I'll send in my resignation."

"Yes, yes, Dandy, perhaps that would be best. And take a holiday—a long holiday," said the crook, with an angelic smile on his lips; but deep down in his heart a satanic plot was already hatching.

Let the young pup keep his secret! The prisoner of Chippendale would probably be only too glad to give up the code words . . . for a glass of water in a few days! Or, if not, there were other effective forms of torture, no doubt!

Leigh, now thoroughly aroused, prepared to treat a

fool according to his folly and take the Chief's smile at its face value.

"In that case, perhaps you would not mind letting me have my watch back."

"Your watch——?"

"Yes. You remember, just before you left I lent it to you."

"Surely——"

With that Sir Thomas Ladman pulled a fine gold lever from his pocket, incredulous.

Leigh pointed to the inscription—a school prize—and Sir Thomas Ladman apologised and handed it over.

"Have I anything else of yours, Dandy?" he said, in his pleasantest manner.

"Only my suit-case, which I lent you last time I was at Winmore, with a suit of plus-fours."

"Oh, of course. I remember now quite well. If you ask Goodbrook, he'll let you have it. It's just where you usually put it."

Then indeed Leigh was dumbfounded, for he had never lent his suit-case to Sir Thomas Ladman at all! But at any rate it afforded him a legitimate excuse for having the chat he wanted with the old butler.

What would Goodbrook contribute to the mystery of Chippendale Manor, thought Leigh? Or was it beginning to be the mystery of Scotland Yard, he wondered?

CHAPTER XIX

Coming to Grips

ALL great generals make mistakes, and crooks, in their war upon society, can hardly be expected to be free from the failing—especially when faced by too certain dangers.

Naturally they choose the lesser of two evils : and this is what Sir Thomas Ladman had done when, rather than admit another failure of memory, he allowed Dandy Leigh to go for his suit-case to Winmore.

He even telephoned to Goodbrook, telling him to give Leigh the suit-case he had taken down to Chippendale, for fear the butler might say he could not find that which belonged to the young detective ; and he thought himself " devilish cute " for doing so.

Leigh, however, was not so keen upon the suit-case as on the opportunity of looking over the Chief's place again, every nook and corner of which was familiar to him—especially the library.

The old butler's eyes glistened with welcome as he admitted Leigh, and the furrows smoothed themselves on his brow.

" Oh, sir, you can't imagine how glad I am to see you again," began the old servant. " It seems ages since you were down here. Doesn't seem the same place, like."

" I've come down, as a matter of fact, to look for a

bag," Leigh was starting, when the butler picked him up with :

" Quite right, sir. The master has just rung through to say I was to give you the suit-case you lent him to go away with, and which I remember he took down to Chippendale."

Leigh could not quite make out how this was, but he let it pass.

" Don't think he's used it since, to tell you the truth," continued the butler. " It wasn't one of those he took abroad, as it contained only a few things for week-ends, and he's not been away since." And Goodbrook led the way up to Sir Thomas Ladman's bedroom.

Everything was just the same ; not a thing had been changed, even to the positions of such familiar articles as the hairbrush on the dressing-table ; for Ladman had always been the most methodical of men.

Yet somehow Dandy Leigh found himself expecting a change. After all, had not the Chief come back to the Yard an absolutely different man ?

Then a thought struck Leigh.

" I wonder whether I am right about the peculiar look of his feet ? "

" By the way, Goodbrook," he said, " that accident seems to have rather spoilt the Chief's shapely feet. Have you noticed ? "

" Noticed ? " replied the butler. " I should just think I have. Why, he has had to buy several new pairs of boots."

" Several ? " inquired Dandy Leigh with surprise.

" Aye, sir. Several, and ready-made ones, too. Not like Sir Thomas, that, but he would not let me give away a single pair of the old ones."

"Indeed. Tell me, did he bring back any from abroad? I know he hates foreign boots."

"No, sir, and that's what I thought so peculiar. He came back from Chippendale with a different pair . . . said he'd trodden on something."

So Ladman's change of boots had occurred before the accident, and the occasion had been his visit to Chippendale, thought Leigh, while the butler rambled on.

"Aye, sir, and, what with other little peculiarities, one would almost swear it was not the same man as had come back."

A new vista of possibilities, almost fantastical, came up before Leigh's mind. For, so far, the scenes he had witnessed had not suggested anything more than a Jekyll and Hyde affair. But Goodbrook had him continually beneath his eye.

"Doesn't read like he used to. Always fidgeting when alone. Never dines out, or entertains. Sees very few of his old friends, and a lot of new ones—and, if I may be pardoned the liberty, sir, not quite the same class,"

Leigh smiled.

"I suppose no man can be a mystery to his butler for the same reason that no man is a hero to his own valet, eh, Goodbrook?"

"Begging pardon, sir, but that's just what he is to me—a mystery, a complete mystery—and me what always used to pride myself on knowing the master inside out, as I was telling of cook, sir, only the other day."

Leigh was still struggling with the lock when the old butler, coming down from the clouds, realised his absent-mindedness, and apologised.

" Oh, I was forgetting, sir. Now I remember. The master was very insistent nothing in that suit-case was to be touched. It was to be left just as it was when he went down to Chippendale, or, rather, came back, so that I was surprised, like, when he told me to give it to you. I suppose I had better empty it."

Leigh thought it best, under the circumstances, to let matters take their course. He allowed Goodbrook to unlock it and place the things on the bed, including the blotter which was the constant companion of Sir Thomas Ladman. But, just as Goodbrook opened it, a letter fell out.

" Hello, what's that? " said Leigh.

The butler picked it up and examined it.

" Why, bless my soul, if it's not a letter to you! " he said.

" To me? Addressed where? " said Leigh eagerly.

" That's just the funny thing about it. It's just got your name, and nothing else."

Dandy Leigh's mind went back to that fatal visit of his to Chippendale. He remembered having asked Vernon Heathfield whether any letter had been left for him, and his reply in the negative. Had Ladman forgotten? Even before his accident!

Taking it from the butler's hand, he was about to open it when a sort of instinct prompted him to examine the envelope more closely.

He gave a start, pulled out a magnifying glass, and, looking at the flap, noticed the sign of intercepted messages.

The letter had been steamed open and then closed, but very carefully—probably by an expert, or one who had been on the censor's staff during the war. This

fact alone exonerated Goodbrook, whom, truth to tell, Leigh was loath to suspect.

Something in his expression, however, evidently betrayed him, for the butler exclaimed :

“ What’s the matter, sir? Anything wrong? ”

Leigh thought a moment, and then, noting the anxious expression on the butler’s face, decided to take him into his confidence.

“ Goodbrook,” he said, “ there’s another mystery here for you. This letter has been opened.”

“ Opened, sir? Oh, quite impossible, sir! Nobody but me and the master has had the key, ever since his visit to Chippendale. I hope you’ll believe me, sir, an old servant like me.” But he had no need to emphasise the point.

“ I’m not accusing you, Goodbrook,” replied Leigh. “ I’d take your word against a thousand, but there’s only one other explanation.”

“ Yes, sir. What, sir? ”

“ It must either have been opened by someone at Chippendale . . . or else by Sir Thomas Ladman since.” But the latter seemed too fantastic to contemplate for the moment.

Possibly the letter would explain itself, and Leigh tore it open.

It was short and to the point, as all the Chief’s instructions were, and ran :

“ MY DEAR LEIGH,—Just a line, in case I leave before you come down, to say that I expect this Heathfield case to have far-reaching ramifications.

“ In case anything should happen to me, or anything go wrong at the Yard, this is my authorisation

to you to see the Home Secretary, and, upon his using the code words we agreed upon, he will know what to do, and you will find everything will work according to plan.

“Yours in haste,

“LADMAN.”

Leigh pocketed the amazing document, with a word of reassurance to the butler for fear of betraying his surprise, adding :

“I don’t wish you to refer to this letter, Goodbrook, if you do not mind. It’s just personal.”

“Very well, sir.”

Then Leigh went on :

“You spoke of the Chief’s new friends, did you not ? Can you tell me anything about them ? ”

“I don’t know,” replied the butler, “that I’m doing right in speaking, but, seeing as how we’re both friends of the old master, and would not like him to get under the influence of anybody——”

Ladman under the influence of anyone ! The idea seemed like a contradiction in terms, and Leigh begged Goodbrook to explain himself.

“Well, it’s this way. There’s that man Griggs is always coming with messages from Chippendale, but it’s my belief Mr. Vernon Heathfield’s the big noise—him and Mrs. Cranley Watson.”

“Go on, Goodbrook,” said Leigh, afraid lest they should be interrupted.

“As I was saying, sir, they seem to have some power over the master.”

“How can you tell that ? ”

“Oh, by their voices. After all, it’s not their house,

they are only guests—or, anyway, visitors—and I think I've been too long among gentlemen not to realise when people don't know their place, or take liberties."

"So Heathfield has been down to Winmore?"

The butler nodded assent.

"Yes, sir, and Mrs. Cranley Watson. But as far as I can gather they mostly meets at Porchester Square. In fact, that's where I think the master must have been the night you rang up."

Leigh tried to reconstruct such a supposition in fact, but the pieces did not seem to fit. Yet it would have explained the agreement about the jewels; the time fitted in, too. It was just a possibility—nothing more.

"But what does Sir Thomas Ladman's chauffeur say?" said Dandy Leigh.

"He doesn't seem to use him as much as he used to. Often he gets queer orders to drop him at certain places, or pick him up at certain places, as if the master did not wish to be followed," said the butler; but, of course, natural caution must explain that.

Indeed, now Leigh came to think of it, the attack of which the Chief had spoken to him before leaving seemed to be very much delayed, although, from the evidence he had himself collected, the crime wave was on the increase.

Strange it should have spared Sir Thomas Ladman, just as if he had been a friend instead an enemy of crooks.

Dandy Leigh, however, knew that he could not protract his visit, and so made his way down, with the butler carrying the suit-case; but, just as he was passing the library, he felt a twitch of curiosity. It was a natural instinct, for Sir Thomas Ladman had

once consulted Leigh on the arrangement of his library, and consequently the young detective knew the position of every single volume.

It only needed a running glance along the long rows of shelves to see whether everything was *in statu quo*. Every single volume was exactly in its place, with two exceptions—a volume of *Raffles* and a dictionary of Oriental poisons ; but in the latter the page had been turned down at the letter D, and a pencil mark set against the word “ Dhatoora.”

Sir Thomas Ladman was too much a scholar and a lover of books ever to deface a volume in that fashion. Who, then, had been at his books ?

CHAPTER XX

The Women in the Case

ALL this while, however, unknown to the conspirators, there had been going on another conspiracy—a plot within a plot—and its chief actors were the women in the case.

The men had all along treated them as negligible factors—and hell knows no fury like a woman scorned. But matters had reached a climax when, upon the morrow of the night club raid, Griggs had attempted to throw over his former mistress.

The fellow had for some time past been seeking an opportunity to pick the final quarrel with Carmen, but Carmen was not of the type to allow her lover to discard her like a broken toy. Certainly not, after having done all she had for her man since she had caused her death to be reported to her own mother in order to get the complete freedom she wanted to help him in his designs.

True, from time to time rumours had reached old Mère Poussain at the little Café de la Liberté in Montmartre that her daughter was alive, but the good soul would never credit them.

How could any daughter forget her mother, much less such a daughter as her Carmen? And this must be taken as the measure of the girl's love for Vernon Heathfield's chauffeur in the days before Grace Seaton had

come upon the scene, and before Griggs himself had found out an easier way of making a fortune than by honest work.

Unfortunately for himself his fall had been gradual, with the result that his partner in crime held him with a stronger chain than love, and so his love, gradually turning to fear, had eventually ended up with hate.

The incident of the earrings, therefore, had become a test case of Carmen's declining power, and Griggs was merciless from the very sense of the danger which she placed him in, and, consequently, might place him in again.

Fabulous wealth he had offered her if she would only wait. She replied she only wanted him. He had increased the bribe, but when she asked him for details he had refused for the first time in his life to let her share his confidence, and she had naturally become suspicious.

Nor had she been reassured by his caution that "telling a woman a secret was like broadcasting," and that this coup he was concerned with was too big for women. She pointed to the fact that Mrs. Cranley Watson was evidently in the know, which Griggs had been forced to admit.

At the same time, he steadfastly denied that his attentions to Grace Seaton were anything but those to which he was bound by the position he occupied in Vernon Heathfield's household as chauffeur.

Carmen laughed in his face as they sat together in a little private room above a Soho café.

"Do not tell your Carmen such lies, *chéri*," she said. "Do you think she cannot tell from your eyes, even, when you are in love?"

Griggs gave her a sullen look, as a man does when tired of an argument with a woman. She returned it with a look of defiance.

" You have ceased to love me ! Answer me ! Is it not so ? "

Griggs, seeing her hatred rising, tried to defend himself.

" You have killed my love," he said, the lie almost visible on his hard, set lips.

" *Tonnerre de Dieu !* You lie to me, Griggs," said the broken woman, turning into a fiend. " You lie to Carmen ! After all I have done for you ! " And she seized a knife, and in her fury she would have stabbed him.

In an instant Griggs had her by the wrist ; but her despair gave her extra strength. He twisted back her hand until she thought he would dislocate it. She gave a cry of agony and dropped the knife, but only to bend down again the moment Griggs had relaxed his grip, and pick it up with her other hand. Again she lunged at him, and in the struggle that ensued a chair and a table covered with glasses crashed to the floor with a heavy thud.

A common sense of danger made them pause in the battle. They did not want the police prying in on them. They listened, in case the noise should have aroused the suspicions of the proprietor of the little Italian café below. Everything seemed normal, the chatter of the customers, and the clatter of the cups and spoons on the counter . . . but carpet slippers make no sound, and, for an old staircase, the footsteps of the eavesdropping proprietor made remarkably little noise.

For a few seconds the two glared at each other in silence. Each saw the folly of physical threats under the circumstances. If it was to be a duel to the death, it must take place elsewhere than Old Compton Street, Soho, where one scream of help would have had the place surrounded within a minute of the murder.

"So that's your game, is it, my girl?" said Griggs. "Very well. I know where I stand now. But I warn you, you'll live to rue the day you threatened me."

"Will I? And what can you do, I should like to know, partner of a hundred crimes!" hissed the she-devil. "Why, I hold you in my hand as surely as a snake caught round the throat."

"You mean you'll split? You'll tell the police?"

"Supposing I do? What is there to prevent me? Besides, why should I not? Answer me that." And the rest was a perfect delirium of reproach extending back over her ruined life to the time when, a simple girl helping her widowed mother, the crook had dragged her down to infamy and shame.

Griggs tried to silence her, but the tirade continued, as if intended for the ears that, all unknown to them both, were listening behind the thin door of the *chambre privée*.

At last Griggs could stand it no longer, and, summoning all his remaining self-control, he said:

"Look here, Carmen, for old times' sake I want to warn you. Don't try that game. I have influence with the police. I know Sir Thomas Ladman, and they would never believe your story. See how we tricked those detectives, although they caught you with the earrings of the murdered woman."

Carmen said nothing, which made Griggs think that he was succeeding in breaking her spirit.

"Do you think you are the first that has threatened us with exposure?" continued the man. "We know the name of every police spy in England, and in a few days will know those of every one of Scotland Yard's spies all over the world. What happened to the last informer? Do you think we would be beaten by you? Don't you remember what happened to Ludi?"

"Well, what happened?" said the girl.

"You know jolly well. We dropped him in the river with a warning pinned to his clothes, and the only witness who, like you, would have turned traitor is now doing time at Dartmoor for a crime we planted on him. . . . Convict 753, I guess, is bitterly repenting a threat similar to yours, my dear Carmen."

The last sentence was spoken with the hiss of a venomous reptile, and, strange to say, the girl seemed suddenly to become cowed, telling her antagonist that he had scored the victory.

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A couple of minutes later the two were emerging into Soho, each taking a different direction to avoid suspicion, little thinking that the eavesdropper had listened to every word of their conversation. But before nightfall it had all been reported to the widow of the unfortunate Ludi, who, it so happened, had known Carmen in the old pre-war days in Paris, before Mère Poussain had taken to vice as a short, economic cut to a virtuous old age.

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By a strange coincidence a little before this time another woman, upon whose life Griggs had thrust

himself unwanted, was wondering how she could triumph over her tormentor.

That woman was Grace Seaton, who, out of a sense of devoted gratitude to the husband of her great benefactor, had been trying for weeks to fall in with the wishes of Vernon Heathfield, who had been pleading the suit of his chauffeur with the same sinister cynicism as had broken everybody else to his will. There was, however, an additional touch of venom in his pleading, for had not Grace Seaton come between him and his inheritance of Chippendale Manor? Yet nothing in his own manner betrayed his real purpose. He had, in fact, already raised Griggs to the position of personal secretary in order to bridge the social chasm that separated his ward from his servant in the eyes of the world.

Long and earnestly the girl had protested. She made no secret of her loathing for the man. Heathfield, on the other hand, pleaded that Griggs threatened to ruin him unless she consented. Contrary to expectation, this had the very opposite effect to that intended. Grace wished him to face his antagonist, even suggesting the co-operation of Dandy Leigh.

This, of course, showed the financier the way the wind blew, as he afterwards explained to Griggs. The girl was already in love, and to the one man who was determined to bring about their downfall; and for this reason alone the crooks would long ago have despatched the young detective, but as we have already seen, the possession of the secret code word had made them refrain.

Their arch-enemy, by a singular irony of fate, could also be their saviour.

At one time Vernon Heathfield had even wavered between Leigh's suit and Griggs's, in the belief that Grace might worm the secret out of the detective ; but he had soon discovered that this was inconceivable. Besides, Grace was every day becoming more and more suspicious of things at Chippendale Manor ; so much so, indeed, that, in spite of her work at the theatre, she had now refused to live in town.

Could this have been at the suggestion of Dandy Leigh ?

Vernon Heathfield cursed the day when his wife had first taken pity upon the young orphan whom she had singled out for a dramatic career, and at the last moment made heir to Chippendale Manor.

Estantkraft had failed, also, in his attempt to break her spirit by forcing her unconsciously into the habit of taking drugs.

That, certainly, was the work of Dandy Leigh !

If Griggs had not suddenly become infatuated with her beauty of soul and of body, and kept to a mistress of his own class and calibre, making her his wife, if he thought he could be faithful to one woman for the rest of his life, everything might have been easy . . . even if it had meant another murder ! Yes, and they would get Dandy Leigh down on the case, and ask him to show the same brilliant powers of investigation which he had displayed in the murder of Mrs. Heathfield ; for there was a satanic strain in the mentality of Vernon Heathfield.

Ambition had seized hold of him like a demon, in his youth making him vault from crime to crime in his pursuit of power, till it had hurried him from folly to folly by the sheer momentum of evil.

Was he going to be balked by a slip of a girl setting herself against his will when he had conquered the whole organisation for the investigation of crime in the greatest city in the world ?

Like many a stronger man, in fact, Vernon Heathfield had made the great mistake of not remembering that, with women, weakness is often the highest form of power.

Had he pleaded Griggs's case under the form of saving or reclaiming of a human being buffeted by fortune, pleaded romance instead of trying the promise of wealth, Grace Seaton, out of sheer devotion to her benefactor, might have contemplated the sacrifice. For a sacrifice it would undoubtedly have been, but great women are built that way.

Instead, they had made the mistake in the first place of using threats, and, in the second, of abusing the one man in the world who stood out of the small circle of acquaintances with the qualities of manhood.

Then on the top of all that had come the passionate pleading of Carmen herself, the unfortunate girl in her despair having gone to Grace Seaton's dressing-room in order to beg her to leave her man.

It was the first thought of Griggs's mistress the very moment after the incident which had taken place in the café in Old Compton Street.

A sort of feminine instinct had sent her thither, and, after the first shock of the revelation, Grace, with the same divine instinct, had understood ; and at once the tiny link of duty which bound her to her benefactor snapped.

She felt not merely free to refuse, but in honour bound to do so.

It was a piteous scene that was enacted between the two women—the one rouged and painted in the guise of her trade, the other fresh with the bloom of English youth that hardly needed the make-up necessary for the footlights.

"Oh, mademoiselle, you forgive, I know. . . But he means so much to me. More than my mother! More than my soul, even more than the *bon Dieu*!" Another poor Magdalen broke into sobs. "Griggs he leave me for you, I know, though he no have say. But I know! Oh, you are very beautiful, and I—I am no more beautiful, but I have love him, all I know how!"

Grace Seaton was seeing in real life for the first time one of those tragedies which she had been acting, and the novel experience thrilled her to the depths of her being.

"My poor girl!" she said, the tears welling up in her own eyes out of sheer sympathy. "Believe me, this is the first time I have heard of it. I do not love Mr. Griggs . . . I don't think really he loves me, but I assure you that I had no notion that you and he——" And the words stuck in her throat.

At the same time the veil was torn from before her eyes.

Could her uncle have known of the real character of the ruffian whom he wanted her to marry, in spite of all he meant to the poor girl?

"Oh, thank you, mademoiselle," sobbed Carmen, who, for all the fiery blood in her veins, could be as sweet as an angel to those who respected her. "I knew you would not steal him from me. I leave my poor mother for him. She think me dead, and I know

she is alive in Paris——” And the girl poured forth the romance of her great tragedy.

A thought flashed across the mind of Grace Seaton.

“What did you say the name of your mother was, my dear, and where is her place?”

“Oh, everybody know the Café de la Liberté in Montmartre, and Mère Poussain. It is—what you say?—a famous rendezvous for ze crooks.”

Grace Seaton started, but she was at once soothed by the naïveté of the reply.

“Poor Maman! Not bad woman, but trade very bad, so the *bon Dieu*, he will understand. He is *pratique*.” A phrase which the girl had no doubt inherited from her mother, with possibly a touch of her temperament.

“I have pray the *bon Dieu* to give him back to me,” continued Carmen. “I have threaten him if he no come back. Now he threaten me with the police! He say I will go like Ludi. We shall see. I no trouble mademoiselle now I know she do not want my man . . . but I will have my vengeance for my mother’s sake.” And the poor girl, kissing Grace Seaton’s hands till they were wet with the tears of gratitude, went forth again into the night, leaving the girl in a maze of bewilderment.

Once again her thoughts naturally went back to Dandy Leigh. For the scene she had just witnessed seemed to cast a flood of light upon everything that had happened since the death of Mrs. Heathfield.

All the strange things she had seen at Chippendale began to gather new significance, but she felt no longer bound by that internal discipline of her training to put the best construction on everything she witnessed.

After all, a man must be judged by his acts, and if Heathfield, in full possession of the facts which the girl had laid before him, still persisted in his endeavour to force upon her a man she now hated, he must take the consequences. She would have to seek other advisers, make new friends, and treat him as one who had become, if indeed he had not always been, unworthy of the great, noble-hearted woman to whom she owed all that now lay before her. But she must give him no inkling of her determination, or even of her change of view.

For, as she argued to herself, the moment they realised that she had acquired the all-important knowledge of Griggs's relations with Carmen, they would no doubt alter their tactics accordingly, and try to deceive her in some other way.

Her very love for Dandy Leigh unfortunately prevented her from appealing to him for advice and protection, at least at this stage. Possibly later she might be forced to do so, but there was still a woman she could consult. For, in her innocence of the realities of life, which her education had kept from her, Grace Seaton could not bring herself to believe that women lost their womanhood.

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Mrs. Cranley Watson smiled inwardly to herself as she received Grace Seaton in her drawing-room at Porchester Square, for a "private chat" about something that was in her mind.

"Why, of course, dear. We are alone," were the Society woman's first words as the girl sat down beside her on the sofa close to the big Japanese screen, behind which no less a personage than Zitinoff lay concealed.

They had been noting a certain change that had come over the young actress for some time past ; and the important part she played in the subtle scheme of propaganda had made them nervous.

On one occasion she had collapsed upon the stage, thanks to an overdose of a drug which Estankraft had administered to her surreptitiously in a cup of tea—the fool ! Hence the note which Grace had sent, by the luck of the devil, to the one Englishwoman who was also a confederate, with the trusting words “ Private and Confidential,” had at once raised the alarm. The very fact, too, that Mrs. Cranley Watson and Grace Seaton had never met on intimate terms showed that the girl was in more than ordinary difficulties.

Indeed, Grace Seaton had it written all over her face, as, with an anxious look around, she prepared to unbosom herself.

“ I really have no right,” began the girl, “ to trouble you with my troubles, but when I tell you, I am sure, as a woman, you will understand.”

Mrs. Cranley Watson drew Grace closer, and kissed her parentally on the forehead.

“ You can trust me like your own mother,” said the Society woman, then, correcting herself, she added, “ I mean, like your own Auntie, for you never knew your mother, you poor darling ! Never mind, I’ll be a mother to you. I often wish I had had a child of my own.” And she gave a sigh, and looked into space, as if raising some dim vision of the past.

The ruse had the desired effect, for what could appeal more to a motherless child than a childless mother ?

Grace Seaton poured forth her sorrows in a way

which would have melted the heart of any woman who had not already been dragged too far into the cogs of the great conspiracy to be able to get back to life without the eternal threat of blackmail that was thrusting her ever deeper and deeper into the machinery of crime.

Indeed, there were moments during the girl's narrative—which, for the most part, consisted of the events which Carmen's visit had brought to a climax—when Mrs. Cranley Watson was genuinely moved; not perhaps altruistically, but none the less really because egotistically.

She, too, was beginning to size up the heads of the conspiracy. They would have as little mercy or regard for her social position as they had for this lovely young English girl's future; and deep down in her heart she felt the call of kindred blood. For a moment she felt the shame of being used by foreigners in her own country for their own purposes, but the presence of Zitinoﬀ behind the screen called her back to her senses.

That had been the subtlety of old Professor Estankraft when, having caught sight of the girl's note as it left the theatre, he had insisted upon sending one of the confederates, for fear Mrs. Cranley Watson might not report the interview in full.

In the momentary conflict in Mrs. Cranley Watson's mind, therefore, the law of self-preservation got the upper hand, as, indeed, it was bound to do under the circumstances.

"Oh, my darling, you really must get all this foolish nonsense about your uncle out of your head, for I'm sure it's all imagination—pure imagination."

"But I tell you he is trying to force that brute upon me against my will!"

Mrs. Cranley Watson made some blundering attempt to whitewash Griggs, but this only made matters worse.

"Are you sure, dear," she said at last, "that the girl was speaking the truth? That's the real point. If she is not, then of course your whole antipathy is baseless and falls to the ground."

It was a clever thrust that at the young girl's innocent credulity, and, seeing Grace hesitate, she prepared to follow up her victory.

"After all, why should you believe the story of this woman whom you have never seen in your life before, and doubt the sincerity of the man to whose wife you owe everything in the world? Isn't it a bit ungrateful, a bit—what shall I say?—disloyal to the dead? What do you think poor Mrs. Heathfield would say if she could hear you now? Did you ever hear from her lips such suggestions as you now level against the man she loved—as she alone could love?"

Grace Seaton, already overwrought, broke down under the strain of her emotions. Had the issue been a clear one she could have faced it bravely either way; but the dilemma was like wild horses dragging her asunder.

Oh for the truth! However terrible, however brutal, rather than this excruciating agony of being called upon to act, in doubt. Yet, thinking again, it was this woman who was putting doubt into her mind instead of solving her problem. Poor Grace Seaton! Her brain felt as if it were crying out for truth like some drowning sailor calling out for help in mid-ocean.

"Do you think Carmen spoke the truth or not?"

said Grace Seaton at last, rousing herself in desperation and looking the woman straight in the face.

"Oh, my dear, why ask me? How can I tell? I've never even seen the woman. I do not mix with that class of person."

"I asked you what you thought. You are a woman of the world," continued the younger woman, "and, in any case, if you do not know the girl, you know the man."

There was no getting away from this challenge. It was like a rapier-point thrusting at her heart.

Mrs. Cranley Watson remained silent.

The next instant Grace Seaton was a different being. The shy, innocent, trusting girl had become a woman: the woman who had for weeks held London spellbound night after night—a tragedy queen in real life at last.

She got up, her eyes flashing, and her pure English soul staring contemptuously upon the fellow-country-woman who had refused to help.

"Very well," said Grace Seaton, "if you cannot, or will not even try to find out the truth for me, I know somebody who will!"

The Society woman affected a shrug of her shoulders, as if to say, like Pilate, that in that case she washed her hands of the matter; but in her mind she had already planned a way of making the meeting of the two women again impossible.

"Do you think you will be able to find her?" said Mrs. Cranley Watson.

"I can try," replied Grace Seaton.

"Suppose you fail?" replied the elder woman.

"Then, in that case," said the girl defiantly—this time with something that to Mrs. Cranley Watson

seemed singularly like a threat, "I shall ask Mr. Dandy Leigh to find her for me."

The name was like a pistol-shot to the Society crook. The woman rushed after her departing guest like a lunatic, in the vain attempt to remedy her mistake, but Grace was already disappearing down the stairs.

She even rushed down after her, forgetting that in so doing she was only adding confirmation to the girl's suspicions. But she was too late, and, as she made her way back into her drawing-room, she was met by Zitinoff.

"You fool, to have let that girl go like that!" he said. Then, changing his tone, he added, "It's my belief you sympathise with her. You women are all alike. Damn you! I've noticed you're growing more and more luke-warm in the Cause. You're trying to feather your own nest independently of us, and get out before the crash comes."

The word "crash" was a mistake. Zitinoff could see it the moment it had fallen from his lips. Mrs. Cranley Watson was staring him in the face like an Englishwoman, and he went on:

"If you think you can do that, you're doubly mistaken. There's not going to be a crash—everything is going splendidly. But if there is, you're for it, any way. A word to Scotland Yard when we're out of it, and how long do you think you will get for the theft of Prince Grika's jewels, eh?"

The unfortunate woman collapsed.

"No, no!" she cried, ringing her hands. "I'm not trying to save myself. I'm not trying to betray you! I swear I'm not! . . . See, you've not a moment to

spare. You must go down to Chippendale and warn them of the danger. Something must be done ! This house must not be searched at any price ! I can't have that fellow Leigh look over my things."

But Zitinoff was not thinking of his brilliant English comrade in arms. His mind was on the summons which Heathfield had sent the big four for that very evening, to meet in solemn conclave at Chippendale.

They would bring this matter up on the committee, along with the more important affairs that no doubt called for attention—since the danger-signal had come from Sir Thomas Ladman.

CHAPTER XXI

“Seconds Out of the Ring”

TO return to Chippendale—the secret conclave was just beginning to be full of anxiety when the arrival of Sir Thomas Ladman was announced.

They could see at once from his face that he had important news, but they were hardly prepared for the bombshell which he now threw in their midst in one sentence.

“I am certain that Leigh knows I am not the Chief.”

For a second it seemed as if the news would be followed by a panic, coming as it did after the reports that everything was going smoothly in other directions. The two foreigners glanced at each other in terror; but Griggs and Heathfield, like Englishmen in the face of danger, suddenly became cool.

“We are quite aware that Leigh is up against us,” said Heathfield, “and has been all along, but it would take more than him to convince the authorities of your impersonation. That’s where we purposely planned an accident to cover up any little thing that might crop up.” But here Ladman cut in:

“I know all about that, and I’ve been playing that card ever since I took the job on—but it’s gone beyond that now.”

“What do you mean?”

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"Well, to begin with, he has noticed that I cannot wear Ladman's boots," continued Gerolstein.

"What else?"

"Then he caught me out wearing his watch."

"Sir Thomas Ladman's gold lever, do you mean?"

"That's just the point! It was Leigh's," replied the other. "We forgot to look inside it. There was an inscription there to that effect."

There was an ominous silence, but Griggs came to the rescue.

"I hope you explained it away by loss of memory?"

"I did," replied the Chief, attempting to reassure his hearers. "And I'm glad to say he did not catch me tripping a second time when he asked me for his suitcase."

The conspirators looked from one to the other, and Ladman went on to explain the incident.

It fell like a second bombshell; but this time it was Heathfield's turn to show concern.

"Good God, man alive! You don't mean to tell me you let him have it?" he asked.

The crook told of his fancied precaution, but this only made matters worse.

"You damned fool!" cried Heathfield. "Didn't you think? Why, it's the bag that your namesake brought down to Chippendale. I told you on no account to touch it. I even gave you the reason."

"I remember your saying something about Dandy Leigh and a letter——" began Gerolstein, when Griggs interrupted him.

"That letter," said the chauffeur-secretary, "was the one in which Ladman, half suspecting treachery, told Leigh that in the event of anything happening he

was to go to the Home Secretary, the one thing which we wanted to avoid.” And he went on to show how important a part this document, undelivered, had been destined to play in the eventual covering up of his tracks once the real Sir Thomas Ladman had been restored to his home.

“Then everything is lost!” said Gerolstein, making as if to go; but his confederates were anticipating treachery.

Heathfield, without moving a muscle of his face, covered him with a revolver.

“Back to the ship, you rat!” he hissed. “We sink or swim together, every one of us, unless you’d like to complete your rôle by impersonating the corpse of Sir Thomas Ladman, with a public funeral! And he laughed, as did the others, at the ghastly humour of such a situation.

Gerolstein followed his announcement of Leigh’s suspicions by a narration of the whole interview, which had reached its climax in the refusal of Dandy Leigh to give the code word.

“There’s only one thing for it now,” said Heathfield. “If you cannot get the code word, you will have to break open the safe.”

The confederates looked at him in amazement. In a few sharp sentences he had mapped out the new plan of attack. The siege would have to be more than a metaphorical one. They would have to obtain possession of the whole place, even if only for an hour, under some pretext or another—and this would be best, possibly, in the early hours of the morning, when the staff of Scotland Yard was at its smallest.

“Your task, ‘Sir Thomas,’” said Heathfield, turning

to Gerolstein, "will, of course, be to see to the details of the plan. You may have to send some of your men on fools' errands, but, if the safe has to be forced, it will have to be forced, and there's an end of it."

Gerolstein felt for a few minutes as though sentence of death had been passed upon him.

"It's madness, sheer madness——" he began. But he knew that refusal would mean death, and once again collapsed into a reluctant assent.

"What if Leigh should approach the Home Secretary," interposed Griggs, "and his suspicions be aroused?"

Heathfield, however, was quite prepared for this objection. The thought was too obvious not to have flashed across his mind, and, with his keen business brain, he had devised a counter-stroke.

"You are quite right to bring that up, my dear Griggs," said the master crook, "and I will tell you what we will do. We must carry the bluff through to the very end. If needs be, Sir Thomas Ladman must ask him down to Chippendale, and come down himself, with Leigh."

There was a gasp of astonishment on the part of all the conspirators.

"Listen," continued Heathfield. "If Leigh sees Sir Keeble Fentworth first, Ladman here must not express surprise, but must be ready to turn the tables upon the young pup, and we will have him locked up as a lunatic if necessary. I know a doctor who will do the certifying rather than do time for performing illegal operations." And a cynical smile played upon Heathfield's lips. "But if once we get him down to Chippendale with Sir Keeble Fentworth, I think that will be unnecessary. . . . Strange things can happen

in a lonely country house like this." And the conclave left it at that.

Griggs's anticipation of Leigh's next step was not wide of the mark ; for the detective had returned from Winmore with but one object—to see the Home Secretary and lay the whole facts before him.

He sent for Morecombe to tell him of his plan. Morecombe listened, and was delighted to hear of his friend's proposed visit to the Home Secretary.

"I haven't exactly been idle myself," said Morecombe at last. "I've been spending a little time round Soho, and I've got on to something interesting about poor old Ludi."

"Good man!" exclaimed Leigh. "What is it?"

"To tell you the truth," replied the other, "I think we're on the road to getting very definite news indeed of what has been going on all these weeks, if what Carmen says is true."

"You've seen Carmen, have you?" inquired Dandy Leigh. "I'm glad of that. She's been a bit of a mystery for years at the Yard. No one seems to know where she came from, or who she really is."

"Well, that's what I've been able to find out, anyway," said Morecombe.

Leigh was all attention, for it might throw a flood of light upon the antecedents of Griggs, whose real character would, in turn, help to light up some of the darkest spots in the darkest character of them all—Vernon Heathfield.

"Her break with Griggs appears to have been final, and her interview with Grace Seaton——"

"Carmen has seen Grace Seaton?" exclaimed Leigh, with surprise.

"Yes, Carmen has seen Miss Seaton," continued Morecombe. "For the girl evidently wanted to give her former lover every opportunity of coming back to her." And he went on to explain the strange series of coincidences by which the knowledge had reached his ears.

"There appears to have been a terrible scene between Carmen and Griggs in a private room above one of the little cafés in Old Compton Street. The two quarrelled and came to blows, making such a noise that the proprietor, who was an old friend of Ludi's, made his way to the stairs and listened."

"Yes. Go on."

"From what he heard it is evident that the girl knows everything about the gang, and threatened to split, when Griggs warned her that if she did in double quick time her fate would be that of Ludi," said Morecombe.

"He threatened to kill her? That means we must protect the girl at once," said Leigh.

"I think she is quite able to protect herself," replied Morecombe. "But, in any case, it is revenge she is after, not protection."

"She'll have her revenge all right if we can lay these fellows by the heels; and that's just where she can help us. She probably knows all about Ludi, and how he was put to death."

"There is somebody who knows more than she does. A man whom they got locked up, and who's serving a sentence for a crime he never committed."

"That must be the man whom Ladman refused to allow out on leave, then."

"That's just what I'm thinking," replied Morecombe.

"But, in any case, it doesn't matter, since we know the number of this one—Convict 753, Dartmoor."

Leigh's mind went ahead to the interview he proposed to have with the Home Secretary. He thought to himself that this would be a welcome addition to the little dossier of facts he proposed laying before him. His colleague continued :

"Now it so happens that the proprietor of this café knows the real culprit, and they are at this very moment trying to bring pressure to bear upon him to confess."

This seemed an unexpected piece of good luck, as Morecombe had called it ; but Leigh realised that it all depended upon the element of time, and he said so. If Ladman had been able to prevent his being let out, even on ticket-of-leave, nothing but a confession could save the situation.

Leigh felt glad that Ladman had refused ; it strengthened his own hand.

"Have you any idea how long it will take them ? Do they even know where he is ?" he asked. And Morecombe replied :

"That's just where we're in luck. Caporelli—that's the old proprietor's name—knows the fellow is at present in Paris, hiding from the French police, and he was last seen at the Café de la Liberté, which, by coincidence, is kept by Mère Poussain, Carmen's mother."

Dandy Leigh pricked up his ears. He remembered the name of the place. He and the Chief had had rather disquieting reports sent in from the French Sûreté only a month before Sir Thomas Ladman's holiday. The latter had asked for further reports, but either none had been sent on or—Sir Thomas Ladman

had not been in a mood to discuss the matter with him since his return.

Yet the reports had dealt with very strange goings-on—which old Mère Poussain had only countenanced because of the solitude which the loss of her daughter had forced upon her.

What would be her attitude with her daughter restored to her under circumstances which would call for vengeance?

“Look here, Morecombe,” said Leigh, “we have not a minute to spare in this affair. Things are moving more rapidly than we think. You must get Caporelli—since he can identify our man—over to Paris with Carmen as soon as possible, and then win over Mère Poussain to us.”

“That will be easy if it aids Carmen with her revenge. Besides, the old woman will do anything for Englishmen,” said Morecombe. “Thank Heaven that someone is grateful for what we did in the war.”

“Yes, you’re right there,” said Leigh. “But don’t forget there are also some who will never forgive us for what we did in the war, and who, failing on the battlefield, are now trying to get a hold of us from the inside, under all kinds of pretences.” But there was no necessity to emphasise this point. Both had realised it when there was no longer any doubt in their minds that they were face to face with what was nothing more or less than a criminal invasion of England.

It was only a question how far Ladman was implicated—there was no other word for it.

Ladman was fighting against, not for, Scotland Yard! Almost everything that had happened since his holiday proved it.

Then, as Leigh was striving for some flaw in his own argument, the thought struck him that one of the last things Ladman had warned him against had been that the crooks would probably stop at nothing in their last battle. Then there was the case of the letter which had never been delivered, again repeating the warning in different words.

That it had been opened he could see for himself as he examined it under a microscope, but it had been carefully done. By whom? Obviously by somebody other than Ladman; someone who had an interest in preventing the warning being taken—not by Ladman, who would have destroyed it.

Suddenly a suspicion of the truth, though only as a mere possibility, struck Leigh like a flash of lightning, and he staggered physically under the emotion.

“Impossible! Ridiculous! Absurd!” came the expressions to his lips. But his reason protested as, point by point, the clues fitted in with the theory. Yes, it explained the boots. It explained the letter. It explained the watch, suit-case, the strange lapse of memory, the wounded hand, now only in a thin silk ribbon, but “useless for writing purposes.”

“My God!” exclaimed Leigh. But it was an expression of terror rather than of joy. For in the same flash he saw the difficulty of putting the theory to the test. Had it not stood the test for weeks? What proof of his could hope to explode it by a phrase, a sentence, a mere piece of logic?

Even if it were true, no one would believe him unless he could produce the real Chief. He would be mad to try and convince anyone! But every minute the theory grew in strength. The new Ladman had

proved himself the friend of criminals—Griggs, Heathfield, Estankraft ! It was to their interest to put up an impostor. To their interest to prevent the warning letter from coming into Leigh's hands ; since Leigh was now left alone to carry out the fight !

Was this what the Chief had had in his mind ?

For some five or ten minutes Dandy Leigh roamed up and down his room like a maniac. The sheer impossibility of the task he had now set himself to accomplish appalled him. But at the same time a sort of divine courage of despair came over him. For if, indeed, the conspirators had been able to accomplish this much, they could accomplish more. In a word, unless Leigh could prove his theory up to the hilt, they would triumph in their designs, even in spite of the written warning which he now held in his hand.

The next minute, however, Dandy Leigh had made up his mind. After all, he did hold the Chief's letter in his hand : the present man could not, even when he heard it, recognise the code word to the safe that contained his life-work. Then there was the ever-growing series of coincidences, all pointing a different finger of suspicion towards Chippendale. Surely, if he begged for an interview in the strictest confidence, the Home Secretary would understand.

Unfortunately for Leigh, Gerolstein was just as good a logician as he was himself, and, using the name " Sir Thomas Ladman," had already got there first, to warn Sir Keeble Fentworth of the peculiar mental aberration from which his young subordinate was suffering,

What could Leigh do ?

CHAPTER XXII

Certified Insane

THAT week-end Dandy Leigh received a summons from Sir Thomas Ladman to visit Chippendale.

On arrival at the manor, he was not surprised to hear that the Home Secretary, Sir Keeble Fentworth, was already there, but, when he learned that a certain Doctor Frybury, a Harley Street specialist, was also a visitor he became nervous. Doctor Frybury was a mental specialist !

Like a shot it came to Leigh the plot that Heathfield and probably Ladman had arranged between them. He was to be allowed to interview the Home Secretary, who had already been prepared, and afterwards he would be certified insane !

Leigh went to his room to unpack, and the first thing he did was to write a note to Morecombe telling him of his suspicions, and begging him to keep in touch, for fear the worst should happen. He knew that the news that these devils might endeavour to have him certified insane would put Morecombe on his metal. He had barely finished unpacking when Vernon Heathfield entered the room.

" Sir Keeble Fentworth would like to see you. I have just left him," said Heathfield. Then, hesitating for a moment, he added, " But before you see him, may I ask you just one question ? "

"Certainly, Mr. Heathfield, any question which you would like."

"Then, what exactly are the relations between yourself and my niece?" inquired Leigh's host.

"I'm afraid I do not know what you mean," replied Leigh.

"Oh, yes, you do," said Heathfield. "Don't think you can deceive me. Ever since your first visit to Chippendale, which, I might remind you, was purely in an official capacity, you have taken advantage of the entrée it gave you to make advances to my niece."

"That is certainly not true, though I have, I confess, promised to help her should she ever be in danger." And Leigh looked him straight in the face.

"She has never been in danger," continued Leigh's host. "But ever since you have been meddling she has changed towards us, and now I suspect her giving up of her position with Professor Estankraft is some of your meddling too."

"No, that is not so: I have only just heard of it."

"At any rate, I blame you for estranging my ward's affections from me," said the other.

"Are you sure you have not done that yourself, sir?" inquired Leigh. Then, his anger rising within him, he could not refrain from coming out with the truth. "Come, come, Mr. Heathfield, you know as well as I do that the real cause is your attempt to force your chauffeur-secretary's suit upon Miss Seaton."

"And pray what business is that of yours?" asked Heathfield.

"None—perhaps. But it is certainly Miss Seaton's and——"

"And who?"

Leigh could control himself no longer.

"I can tell you that it is a person who is even now fighting for her rights, or her revenge . . . Carmen. Do you know her?"

Heathfield's face was livid with anger. The thing was an insult, an outrage.

"By God, I'll make you pay for this!" he hissed between his teeth, while his fingers twitched nervously, as if he would like to have grasped the young detective by the throat and throttled him where he stood.

Dandy Leigh saw the danger of anything like a scene with Heathfield in his own house. Possibly the man had purposely tried to goad him to a breach of etiquette. It would have placed the whip-handle in his grasp.

"I've sent for you, Leigh," began Sir Keeble Fentworth, "because you appear to me to have been going about your duties lately with the most ridiculous ideas in your head."

"Excuse me, sir," said Leigh, "but if you will only give me an opportunity of laying before you some of my reasons——"

The old man smiled in a fatherly kind of way.

"Come, come," he said benignly, "I think I know what you are going to say. Sir Thomas Ladman has told me you have behaved in the most unaccountable manner since his return."

"I have behaved! Why, all the Yard is saying——" began Leigh, seeing where the argument was going. But the Home Secretary cut him short.

"If you imagine," he said, "that Sir Thomas Ladman bears you any personal ill-feeling—and I think your fifteen years of association with him is enough

to refute that—I can assure you that you are very much mistaken.”

“But, sir, if you will only listen——” protested Leigh. But Sir Keeble Fentworth was not of the type to be talked down.

“If you will only listen to *me*,” he said in a tone which made it perfectly clear that it was a command. “I want to assure you that, as a matter of fact, Sir Thomas Ladman has been interceding with me on your behalf. Unfortunately, you seem to be suffering from a certain kind of delusion.”

“I am convinced, sir—the facts have forced themselves upon me—you will realise yourself when I give you my proofs——” pleaded Leigh.

The Home Secretary’s face changed, and the tone of his voice became severe.

“If you think I am going to bandy words with you, young man, you will find yourself mistaken. I refuse to turn the interview into a debating society. I ask you in one word—what is the conclusion you have reached? I don’t care a damn about your reasons—I still have the use of my own.”

Dandy Leigh took his courage in both hands. After all, they were alone, and, if the thing had to come out sooner or later, it might as well come out in a confidential heart to heart talk, as man to man. At any rate, it was a thing that could easily be put to the test and settled one way or another once and for all.

“All I ask,” said Leigh, “is some proof of the identity of the Sir Thomas Ladman now occupying the position of Commissioner of Police with the Sir Thomas Ladman who a few weeks ago was on his holiday.”

The official stared in amazement at Leigh.

"And you assert?" said Sir Keeble Fentworth, almost like a challenge.

"That he is not the same man, Sir Keeble," said Leigh bravely.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when from behind a screen there emerged the figures of Sir Thomas Ladman and Doctor Frybury.

The moment that Dandy Leigh saw the Chief and the specialist emerging from their hiding-place he knew that he had fallen into the very trap he had been trying to avoid.

The two were arm in arm, and Sir Thomas Ladman, with a look of angelic pity upon his face, turning to Doctor Frybury, said :

"As you see, it is, as I suspected, purely a mental case."

The words were spoken in a whisper, but sufficiently loudly to be audible to Dandy Leigh, who felt as one shot in the back.

"I protest, sir," he began, addressing the Home Secretary. "I thought you asked my opinion in confidence!"

But Sir Keeble Fentworth paid no attention. Instead, looking towards Doctor Frybury, he addressed his remarks to him.

"You are satisfied, doctor?" he asked quietly.

Leigh looked from one to the other, trying to guess the conversation that must have preceded this obviously planned interview.

"As you know, my dear Sir Keeble Fentworth, I come across a lot of very remarkable cases in my profession, no two of which, I may add, are ever
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exactly alike. But in the matter of hallucination the phenomenon follows no regular course, provided, of course, that nothing intervenes to complicate the psychological attitude . . .” And the specialist rambled on in a non-committal sort of way.

Meanwhile Leigh saw Sir Thomas Ladman and Sir Keeble Fentworth exchanging glances. Then the Chief, with a sickly look of obsequiousness which the young detective had certainly never seen in Sir Thomas Ladman, said :

“ So long as I have satisfied you, Sir Keeble, upon the main fact, which you might otherwise have had cause to doubt, I think the rest might be left to our friend Doctor Frybury.”

Dandy Leigh felt as if the gates of some terrible prison were about to close upon him, and as if an instant challenge and appeal were his only hope.

Sir Keeble Fentworth, taking his cue from Doctor Frybury, who was moving his head about significantly as if to indicate that it would be better if they were left alone, was proceeding to move towards the door, when Dandy Leigh felt impelled to rush forward.

“ I protest, sir ! ” he said in his despair. “ I can prove this is a plot ! I am as sane as they are ! I defy this man who calls himself Sir Thomas Ladman to go through any test—memory, writing, finger-prints——” But the strong arm of Doctor Frybury was already upon his wrist, while Sir Thomas Ladman now placed himself between Leigh and the Home Secretary.

With a quick twist of the arm Leigh managed to wrench himself free, but Sir Thomas Ladman barred the way. The movement evidently suggested to Sir Keeble Fentworth that his presence might be the cause

of a "fit," so that he hastened his steps towards the door, while Leigh attempted to brush past Ladman.

Whether what ensued had really been rehearsed between them Leigh could never quite make out, but the next instant he found himself gripped as with an iron vice, just as Sir Keeble Fentworth disappeared down the corridor.

Bringing his free hand to the rescue, Leigh saw that it was Ladman's wounded one.

"With a cry of joy, he made one despairing appeal to the retreating official, and cried :

"Look ! A proof !"

But he said no more, for before he could utter another word he felt a handkerchief clapped over his mouth. Doctor Frybury's two strong arms lifted him off his feet and cast him on to the ground. Then, as he lay there half-stunned, Dandy Leigh distinctly saw the Harley Street specialist deal a crashing blow at the face of Sir Thomas Ladman, who fell like a log beside him. Before he could even recover from his surprise the doctor was upon him again, at the same time shouting to the household for help.

Within a minute Heathfield and Griggs, and of course Sir Keeble Fentworth, again rushed to the rescue, followed by as many of the servants as were in earshot, the while good Doctor Frybury recounted to half a dozen witnesses the story of the madman's brutal attack upon the Commissioner of Police, whose temple was pointed to in proof of Dandy Leigh's lunacy.

Five minutes later the young detective was being conveyed to his room under Doctor Frybury's orders, the while Sir Thomas Ladman was standing over him, forgiving his enemy, as every Christian should.

Leigh saw at once that any physical attempt at regaining his liberty, or any verbal attempt at proclaiming his innocence, could only prove fatal to his last chance of ultimate success. He determined, therefore, to give them no opportunity of taking severer measures with him. His eternal optimism and belief in providence gave him hope ; while his own active brain began to analyse the slender possibilities of escape. To give him due credit, Sir Keeble Fentworth was as sympathetic and as human as a man could be under the circumstances ; but then, had Gerolstein provoked any other attitude of mind, he would only have been revoking in a game which he considered already won.

" If I might make a special request," said the crook, " I should like to ask that no mention of this be made, Sir Keeble ; a few days, and everything may be as it has always been between us, and nobody would be more sorry than myself to think that fifteen years of friendship should be wrecked by a tragic incident such as this."

Strange to say, both Heathfield and Griggs (who, as we have seen, had now risen to the position of secretary) heartily endorsed the suggestion, expressing the utmost concern about Leigh's welfare. But, much as the young detective resented their attentions, he knew only too well that it would make matters much worse for him if he betrayed his real sentiments. So he kept on thinking. Why this forgiveness ? Why this care ? Why this ever-recurring reference to the future when everything would be well again ?

Meanwhile, a sort of consultation was held by his bedside, Doctor Frybury shaking his head professionally

from side to side, as Sir Thomas Ladman expressed the opinion that the danger was over.

"That is, of course, so far as concerns yourself, Sir Thomas," said the Harley Street man, "and I am sure we all admire the noble feelings which prompt you to forgiveness. But, as a man of science, used to mental cases, I do not think we can be too careful."

Here Heathfield broke in :

"Do you think, doctor, that the patient could be any danger to himself? I think the rest of us can look after ourselves ; but, in spite of this strange delusion which seems to have set him against us all, I should be sorry if any lack of precautions upon our part resulted in his being a danger to himself."

Doctor Frybury did not answer for a minute, and then in a hesitating sort of way turned to Ladman, and said in a whisper, not quite low enough to be inaudible from where Leigh lay on his bed :

"I do not wish to appear to pry into the young man's private affairs, Sir Thomas, as you can well understand, but is there by any chance a lady in the case? "

Sir Thomas Ladman, before replying, went over to where Sir Keeble Fentworth and Vernon Heathfield were standing, and the three held a consultation.

Leigh's heart sank as he heard the name of Grace Seaton pass their unhallowed lips. He wanted to get up and . . . But what could he do that would not have made, not merely his own case, but hers, worse, for they evidently held the Home Secretary in the hollow of their hands.

It must all have been planned with the whole of Estankraft's technical dramatic skill, this scene they were now enacting, and he had little doubt that they

would not have hesitated at murder had they not hit upon this more scientific form of revenge.

It was Vernon Heathfield who came forward with the reply :

" I am very sorry to say, doctor," he remarked, " that there is a lady in the case. And I'm still more sorry to say that that lady is my ward."

" Your ward, Mr. Heathfield? Not, surely, the beautiful Grace Seaton about whom all London is raving? " exclaimed the Harley Street man.

Ladman here took up his cue.

" Yes, Miss Seaton is the lady," he said. " The two met when I sent Leigh down here on the occasion of our host's terrible bereavement—just before my holiday—and the girl, no doubt under the influence of her grief, seems to have turned to him for protection."

" Am I to understand it was with your approval, Mr. Heathfield? " continued the doctor. " I was under the impression that, quite apart from being a woman of talent, she is also an heiress."

" You are quite right, Doctor Frybury," said Ladman. " If I may say so, it is one of the few cases which we have had at the Yard of anyone trying to use his professional position to his social advantage."

Leigh could stand it no longer. He jumped from his bed, and once again tried to reach the Home Secretary, crying out in his anger :

" It's a damned lie, and they know it ! Listen, sir, only listen——"

It was a fatal move on his part—especially the adjective, for Griggs, who was standing near at hand, seized upon it as an opportunity of pretending to protect Sir Keeble Fentworth. Flinging himself upon

Leigh from behind, he pinned him to the ground, while the young detective's attempts to free himself from the fellow's ju-jutsu grip was, of course, looked upon as another dangerous spasm. Before he could utter another word the others had likewise thrown themselves upon him, calling for help from the servants.

A couple of minutes later these appeared, and when some ropes had been discovered Dandy Leigh found himself being securely bound hand and foot, the while Doctor Frybury and Sir Keeble Fentworth looked on approvingly.

"We must at all costs," said the Harley Street man, "protect him from himself. These murderous outbursts often turn to suicide when foiled."

"Of course, of course," said the Home Secretary, who, turning to Sir Thomas Ladman, added, "I can quite understand the anxiety you must have felt all this time if, as you say, this has been developing ever since your return from abroad. I can only admire your forbearance."

CHAPTER XXIII

Over the Top

DURING dinner that evening the butler suddenly entered the room and, crossing hastily to Heathfield, handed him a note, with the remark that "the person was waiting."

Heathfield muttered an apology as he opened the note and began to peruse its contents. A moment later he had fallen back in a dead faint.

Grace Seaton at once rushed forward, but Ladman and Frybury got to Heathfield first.

A stiff brandy administered by the doctor, and Heathfield was soon himself once more.

"Really, Sir Keeble, Sir Thomas, I owe you a thousand apologies. Bad news. A friend—a very dear friend has died."

The lie had no sooner crossed his lips than the butler stepped forward with, if anything, still more insistence, and said :

"Excuse me, sir, but the party says—ahem—unless you go down to see him he will come up to you."

Vernon Heathfield, catching the look of amazement upon the Home Secretary's face, felt inclined to reply in his first haughty manner, but something in the look of the butler seemed to cave him into obedience, and in another couple of seconds he had left his guests to themselves.

The next thing they heard was the sound of loud voices in the lounge below, followed by a scuffle, and then the heavy banging of the door—during which, needless to say, the meal had come to a standstill. No actual words could be heard, and when they seemed to be getting distinct, Sir Thomas Ladman and Doctor Frybury both began talking loudly, as if to drown them; the while Grace Seaton and Sir Keeble Fentworth kept silent.

In a few moments Vernon Heathfield came up, trembling from head to foot with emotion and looking deathly pale, and it became obvious at once that the dinner-party was at an end.

He begged his guests to excuse him for a few minutes, without volunteering a single word of explanation, and asked Grace to be good enough to entertain Sir Keeble Fentworth while the others followed after him.

For a moment or so the two left together, Sir Keeble Fentworth and Grace Seaton, looked at each other in uncomfortable surprise.

Grace was the first to recover herself. She walked over to the Home Secretary and said:

"I'm sure you will forgive me, but—can you tell me what they propose to do with Mr. Leigh? Is he in any danger? Do you know, he is the only one I really trust of all the men I have met down here since my aunt's death, which seems to have changed everything and everybody."

Sir Keeble Fentworth, with his old-world chivalry, had a strange belief in women's instincts.

"Tell me, child," he said, "tell me quite frankly, what is it you fear? I do not ask for your reasons—just for your fears."

Grace Seaton hesitated a moment, then, with an impulsive sob, she said :

" Oh, I know you will think me mad too, but—I cannot help it—for weeks I have been dreaming that they intend——"

" They, child ? Who do you mean by ' they ' ? " asked the Home Secretary, his interest helping to throw off his mental numbness.

" I mean my uncle, Professor Estankraft, my uncle's secretary Griggs, whom he wants me to marry——"

" Why, was not Griggs a short time ago your uncle's chauffeur ? "

" Yes, but they are trying to force me all the same . . . and that is why they are doing everything they can to break Mr. Leigh. I sometimes think they would like to kill him if they could, though it may be safer to get him declared mad."

The girl seemed astounded at her own courage, but there could be no doubt that such were her inmost thoughts.

" But, my dear child," said the astounded Cabinet Minister, " surely you do not include Sir Thomas Ladman in your ' they ' ? " But here the girl broke down in sobs.

After all, he had asked for her impressions, not her reasons, and she had given them.

" It's no good asking me to prove things," she continued. " I can only ask you, if you do not believe me, to try them for yourself."

The very next moment Doctor Frybury walked in, accompanied by Sir Thomas Ladman, but they made no apology for having left him ; and no wonder, for the one thought uppermost in their minds was the

danger of leaving the girl alone with the only man who could save Leigh.

"Well," said Sir Keeble Fentworth, "and how is our host?"

The Harley Street man, adopting the professional manner once again, replied :

"I'm not at all at my ease, I am sorry to say. . . . Indeed, if you will excuse my suggesting it, I am not at all sure that we should avail ourselves of his hospitality this week-end, if we can get back to London"—a suggestion which came strangely from a medical man, thought Sir Keeble Fentworth.

"As for myself," added Sir Thomas Ladman, "I should be glad of an opportunity of getting that madman of ours out of the house. I could give him a lift in my car. I'll have him examined by the special Yard doctors"—a suggestion rather on the lines of Grace Seaton's strange fears.

Just as they were speaking, the butler opened the door to ask whether the gentlemen would take coffee in the lounge, and, as he did so, there came the sounds of a powerful radiophone.

Sir Thomas Ladman here volunteered the information that Mr. Vernon Heathfield often found pleasure in "listening-in," whereupon Doctor Frybury added that, medically speaking, it had certain soothing effects on highly strung nerves.

The Home Secretary listened. The music was a piano solo—from some Central European station, to judge from the voice of the announcer—and it struck Sir Keeble Fentworth that if Heathfield was well enough to appreciate music, he was well enough to resume his duties as host, or at least to come up and

excuse himself, instead of leaving it to one of his guests.

It was all a momentary reflection—almost an instinct—but he was interrupted from following it up by the return of his two fellow-guests to the suggestion of abandoning the week-end party, which both now seemed to urge with strange persistence, without reference to Grace Seaton's views on the matter.

"Excuse me," said Fentworth, with the slightest suggestion of censure in his tone, "but don't you think we might consult our hostess in the matter?"

This suggestion seemed to take them by surprise, natural as it was.

"Far be it from me to intrude in any way," he continued, "but possibly Miss Seaton might feel nervous about her uncle's health, and would appreciate our presence, at least till the morning."

"At any rate," interposed Sir Thomas Ladman, "I think it might be a good thing if we got Leigh back to town, as I am sure Doctor Frybury will agree . . . with our host prostrate with grief, which of course alters everything."

Once again Sir Keeble Fentworth came back to the girl's warning, but here Grace interposed :

"Surely," she said, "if Mr. Leigh is as bad as you make out, a night journey would hardly improve his condition—especially as it seems likely the night will be very misty ; in fact, I saw in the papers that we shall probably be having a fog."

"I certainly agree with Miss Seaton," said the Home Secretary. "And I am rather surprised that, as a medical man, Doctor Frybury did not think of it before." And, the doctor still protesting, Sir Keeble

Fentworth made up his mind. "I think," he said, "I should like to see that young man again."

Sir Thomas Ladman at once volunteered to accompany him.

"Most certainly, Sir Keeble, but I think I ought to go with you, for fear of any danger."

"Thank you. I wish to see him alone, if you please."

"As a medical man, Sir Keeble——" began Doctor Frybury. But a look from the Home Secretary was sufficient to remind that worthy that it takes more than naturalisation papers to pass for an Englishman.

A few minutes later, Sir Keeble Fentworth was making his way to where Dandy Leigh was lying, still bound hand and foot.

Leigh could hardly believe his eyes as the door opened and he saw the Home Secretary come in alone.

"Thank God I can see you for one minute alone, sir," he began, "for I am more than ever convinced ——" But Sir Keeble Fentworth held up his hand.

"I do not want to go into the details of the matter," he said quite kindly, "but if there is anything that you could lay before me, and that you would like me to go into, I am perfectly willing to do so."

Leigh thought for a moment.

"I have been expecting something like this to happen for some time," he said. "And I have therefore warned Mr. Morecombe, who will let you have all the details upon which we have based our conviction, but in the meantime——"

They could hear steps coming up the passage.

"Yes? Speak quickly!"

"In the meantime," repeated Dandy Leigh, "I can only ask you to take the letter of Sir Thomas Ladman that I sent you as if it were his last will and testament."

But, before he could say more, Vernon Heathfield rushed into the room in a state of great agitation.

"Doctor Frybury has just warned me that you intended to come up, Sir Keeble," he said excitedly. "And also that it seems you are averse to Sir Thomas Ladman removing the patient."

The Home Secretary eyed his host for a second without replying, and then said:

"Have you any objection to Mr. Leigh's staying here under your roof until I can send down a specialist with whom I am personally acquainted?" And there was a deliberate sting about these last words.

"I think, Sir Keeble," said the irate financier, "you must allow me to be master in my own house, at least when it comes to having a raving lunatic!"

"Excuse me, Uncle," said a soft voice beside him, "but if it comes to calling Mr. Leigh a lunatic, I must remind you that Chippendale is mine." It was the voice of Grace Seaton.

"In that case," said Sir Keeble Fentworth, turning to his hostess and ignoring the man whom he had hitherto regarded as his host, "in that case, Miss Seaton, I should deem it a great courtesy if you would allow Mr. Leigh to occupy this room till I can send somebody down from town. Meanwhile I shall return to London."

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To say that Vernon Heathfield was amazed was to put it very mildly, especially as he saw his guest and

his ward turn on their heels and walk out of the room. But he did not attempt to overhear the conversation which took place between them as they did so.

"I want you, Miss Seaton," said the Cabinet Minister, "to keep an eye on everything that takes place here. If possible, do everything that Mr. Leigh asks you to do, and if anything should go wrong, let me know at once."

Grace could hardly find words to express her gratitude, but, as ill-luck would have it, Doctor Frybury came up before she could get further details of Sir Keeble Fentworth's wishes, and what exactly he meant by "wrong." To her, everything was wrong, though only in a vague, indefinite sort of way; for, needless to say, Leigh had not conveyed to her any of those suspicions which for weeks had been crowding in upon him from everything associated with Chippendale. She could only rejoice that if things went worse—and of this she was determined to make Dandy Leigh the judge—she was sure of finding a friend in the Home Secretary, whom they had done everything in their power to make an enemy.

Meanwhile, though the fog was now getting denser and denser, Sir Keeble Fentworth, Sir Thomas Ladman, and Doctor Frybury insisted upon returning to London, Vernon Heathfield and Griggs making protests so mild as to be almost a dismissal of their distinguished guests.

They had no sooner departed, the glare of their car lights being instantly swallowed up into the night, than Heathfield called Grace to him.

"Is this the way you repay all the kindness you have

received from my late wife and myself? " he asked, in a tone that but thinly disguised his anger.

The young girl kept her dignity and self-restraint.

" If you refer to my debt of gratitude to Auntie," she said, " I defy you to point to anything I have ever said or done that does not show my love for her memory. If, on the other hand, you think that this gives you a right to force upon me a man whom I despise, and to whom, even if I loved him, another woman has a better right, I tell you I'd rather die first! "

" You are in love with this fellow Leigh," replied Heathfield. " And he is after you for your fortune."

" It's a lie. I had summed up Mr. Leigh's character in the first five minutes of our meeting—which was, you will remember, before the will was read. Griggs, on the other hand, was, and is, our servant. Is he not more likely to be after my money than a gentleman—even if he does happen to be poor? "

Heathfield knew that he had no answer, and he tried to exercise his authority instead.

" Go to your room and stay there. I refuse to discuss the matter with you. To-morrow you shall know my plans."

" Your plans for me! In my own house! Are you not forgetting yourself? Do you realise that legally, if I wanted to, I could turn you out to-night? "

The words came out in spite of herself. She did not even know whether she had the power they indicated, but the effect, to her intense surprise, was instantaneous.

Vernon Heathfield changed his tone completely.

" Ah, well," he said, " do not let us quarrel to-night. Can't you see I've had very bad news—I'm all upset? "

I have a lot to talk over with Griggs. Go to bed, there's a dear, and to-morrow, maybe, we'll be able to understand each other better." And the great financier mopped his brow, as if going through some excruciating agony.

At first his ward was inclined to disbelieve these outward signs of illness, but closer observation convinced her they were genuine. But they were not the signs one usually associates with mourning the loss of a friend, but rather with the meeting of an enemy.

Just as she was hesitating, Griggs rushed into the hall with a look of terror on his face, the while sounds of anger issued from the direction of the servants' hall.

At once she knew that the explanation given to Sir Thomas Ladman and Sir Keeble Fentworth for the scenes she had witnessed that night could not possibly have been the real one. There was some awful secret about the place ; some terrible mystery ; something that had been hanging over their heads for weeks, and that was apparently about to crash down upon them all . . . something that they wanted to keep from her.

Heathfield repeated his request that she should retire, and Griggs had the insolence to add his own persuasions.

As mistress of Chippendale, Grace was about to demand the reason for the disturbance, but on second thoughts, she realised that it would only be useless. Would it not merely give them another opportunity of deceiving her ? So instead she determined to play deceit by deceit. She begged her uncle's pardon, expressed solicitation about his worries, said she was

dead beat and would be glad of a good night's rest, and with that retired to bed—but not to sleep.

Indeed, no one was destined to sleep at Chippendale that night, for zero hour—the time fixed for the final assault upon Scotland Yard—was about to strike, and they were still only half prepared, and with mutiny threatening them within their own ranks. Outside, the mist had given way to a great blanket of greenish-yellow fog that lay heavy, and by to-morrow would plunge London into the darkness of night—the signal for the greatest *coup* ever attempted in the annals of crime.

But they had never reckoned with the presence of Dandy Leigh and Grace Seaton at "Crook G.H.Q.," listening in to their last council of war before battle, and Morecombe hurrying to the rescue with the knowledge for which they had been seeking for months.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Man from Dartmoor

IT was little wonder that Vernon Heathfield had fainted upon receipt of the note presented to him at table by the butler, for it contained what was practically a sentence of death.

The terror which had haunted him for years in his dreams had come true. One by one he had played off crook against crook till he had become master of them all, his victims finding even Dartmoor a refuge from his power ; but at last one had been found willing to sacrifice himself for the sweetness of revenge.

The mills of hate, like the mills of God, grind slowly, but not even a millstone can compare for hardness with the human heart's endurance in the pursuit of justice ; and it was for this reason that Carmen had singled out the one man in the whole world who would be ready to do everything to avenge her, not merely on Griggs, but on the whole gang.

It was the announcement of his presence which had set the household in a panic. For what prison life had failed to do, Carmen's piteous story, and that of Mère Poussain, had accomplished.

The victim of years of the most scientific blackmail had suddenly gained the giant's strength of despair, obsessed with the single overpowering passion of revenge, even though it might cost him his life.

Only by a trick had he been deterred from rushing into the dining-room and laying his story before the Home Secretary. Indeed, they would not have scrupled at killing him had not his first words been an intimation that the game was already up, and that Morecombe had got wind of their intentions in regard to Leigh, if not the secret of their whole plan in regard to Scotland Yard.

A week earlier or a week later, the mysterious ex-convict's appearance and threat would have been met by some diabolical piece of foul play, but with the fog now upon them—the signal for assault—it was too late.

A word from him in the right quarter, and the false Sir Thomas Ladman would be exposed, and Heathfield and his gang crushed as so many viper's eggs in their nest. Indeed, they wondered why he had not gone straight to the authorities, if it was his intention to betray them, and the slender hope that the fellow was trying to put up a bluff upon them made them stay their hand.

Besides, there was the fellow's knowledge of Morecombe's movements, which formed an additional security for him. It was a knowledge of the utmost importance to them, a knowledge they must have before they could go a step further and give the final signal for assault. But it had required a physical struggle to obtain the mastery, and it was this struggle, accompanied by the giving of orders and his own shouts of protest, which had penetrated to the dining-room during Heathfield's absence in command of the situation, the while Ladman and Frybury were keeping Sir Keeble Fentworth talking at table to Grace Seaton.

But, the moment their distinguished guests had left,

the storm broke out anew, this time in real earnest, and Griggs and Heathfield had to "face the music."

"So we meet at last, Vernon Heathfield," said the convict, gloating in triumph like a beast of prey over its victim, though, with a guard on either side of him, it looked rather as though the positions were reversed. "Can you appreciate how I have longed for this day?" And it was all they could do to stop him from flying at the financier's throat. "Do you think years breaking stones in Dartmoor, summer and winter, has made me forget?"

"Look here, if you try any of that stuff I'll hand you over to the French police on that charge of murder you escaped."

"Do, and I'm ready to stand by the verdict of the French courts. Do you think I would not have braved that years ago, save for one thing?"

"What thing?"

"This," replied the convict. "That I could only have brought sorrow on the one woman I loved so much that I was willing to give her up for another."

"Is that your love? Then why not take her back from the man who no longer wants her?"

The convict made a rush forward, his lips firing off a volley of curses, and his uplifted arm claspings a knife which he had somehow secreted about his person. But they held him back.

"You beast incarnate! You hell-fiend! You devil!" he cried, while Heathfield, trying to remain calm in the presence of the rank and file for the sake of his own authority, replied:

"Come, come. Why do you always threaten, always seek revenge? Don't you know that if it was not for

this we should long ago have come to terms? You drove us to put you out of the way in sheer self-protection. Why not be reasonable, even now? After all, is not your own dream coming true? Look—the day which you had planned, the very situation! Ladman in our power, London at our mercy, and only an idiot to pursue us after the great *coup*—for that will be all Sir Thomas Ladman's brain will seem like by the time that we get him from our dungeons back into his bed again at Wimbledon. Even now I promise you a share that will make you and Carmen independent for the rest of your days."

Grace Seaton listened spellbound. For, unseen and unheard by the servants, she had managed to creep down the stairs and crawl along the balcony in the hall to witness the amazing scene that was now revealing to her for the first time the real secret of Chippendale Manor.

There, below her, she could see the convict, haggard, travel-stained, hungry, yet a strange nobility of aspect in his face in spite of it all, and a look in his eyes like nothing that she had ever seen before—unless, perchance, some dream vision of justice; around him the men and women who had served her almost servilely, suddenly transformed by the mysterious purpose which held sway over them and became their masters.

She could hardly believe her eyes, her ears, her every sense; she only knew that the scene froze her limbs into immobility so that she could not have screamed, even if she had been so disposed; she could only listen on as her ideals crashed around her on all sides.

This—home—and the man who was to her a second father apparently the arch-villain of the piece!

The young girl looked at the convict as, gathering the main threads of his tragedy, she heard her uncle throw out the bribe a second time.

"After all," continued Heathfield, "you need not turn round upon your old pals as if you were a white man. You conceived the plot we're carrying out!"

"My God, yes! In a moment of desperation, when you had driven me to it! An idea, and nothing more—a simple fog burglary, but not this!"

"Great trees come from little seeds," continued the financier. "That simple idea, and the other one of getting a double for Ladman——"

Grace Seaton strained forward closer, her heart beating great hammer-blows with terror at its own sound, lest they should betray her.

"Damn you! Don't you think I've not repented every single thought of it? But, anyway, you can't bribe me with wealth now. It's too late. I want justice, or, rather, revenge. . . . What is going to happen to Carmen?"

This time the convict turned to Griggs, and the flash in his eyes was like the slash of a whip, and the chauffeur writhed under it.

"What the devil do I care?" he said. "I'm in love with a lady, and, by God! I'm going to have her by hook or by crook. It's my share of the spoil."

As he uttered the words, Grace saw a look come into the convict's eyes which could only be described as murder.

He turned to Heathfield and shot out the question:

"Not Tom Seaton's babe? Heathfield, you black-guard! I swore by all that's holy, out there in Flanders, as he died in my arms, she'd be safe. He

was a white man, and, by heaven, I'll see she marries a white man too!" But, before Grace Seaton could hear more, the convict had made a superhuman effort and had precipitated himself on Heathfield.

There was a cry of agony as the two figures met, then a scuffle as every single one of the crowd rushed to Heathfield's rescue, and in her emotion she must have uttered a cry, for the next moment the whole place was plunged into darkness and chaos.

Any other woman but Grace Seaton would have fainted, or at least have felt afraid or excited. Not so Grace Seaton. The truth had made her strong, and her strength seemed to cool her blood, and give her courage and balance.

If what she had witnessed was true, then there could be no further doubt that the whole episode in which Dandy Leigh had figured was nothing but part of this same conspiracy.

The danger he found himself in was due to his devotion to her. She would show him the same loyalty and now go to his succour, and then the two would have to combine their efforts to try and frustrate the plans of these devils in human form.

And Grace Seaton, taking advantage of the confusion, made her way quickly in the direction of Dandy Leigh's room.

"Good heavens! What on earth is the matter, Miss Seaton?" he said. "You look as if you had witnessed a murder!"

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Leigh, I believe I have. Something terrible has happened—is happening, and is about to happen!"

"Are you in danger? That is the only question for me."

From the terrified look upon her face, Dandy Leigh could see for himself the girl's agitation.

"It is not myself I am thinking about, but you. After what I have seen, I feel that if you are still up against them they will not scruple at murder. You must get out of this as soon as you can."

In as few words as she could, Grace Seaton told the young detective what she had witnessed, at the same time loosing the ropes with which he had been bound.

It was a difficult job, for, in addition to the ropes, the crooks had used silk-covered wire, and, from the noise which reached them through the echoing passages, it was obvious that the gang were moving about. But, strangest of all, they could hear the strains of the radio coming up also—one of the piano solos she had referred to once before.

"Look here," said Dandy Leigh, "it's far too dangerous to run the risk of letting them find you here. Now I have my hands free, I can wriggle out gradually in good time, and make my escape when all is quiet again. But first hand me my automatic from my suit-case, then take the tiny little revolver you will find under the cigars."

Even as he spoke they could hear footsteps passing overhead—heavy footsteps, as of men carrying a weight.

Both Leigh and his rescuer kept still as death.

"I know what it is," said Grace Seaton. "They must be taking Dalton—you know, the convict—into the tower room."

They listened again. There could be no doubt about it.

"Good!" said Leigh. "It means that they shrink from death in his case too. Tell me, how do you get up there?"

"As it happens, there is a little circular staircase at the end of the passage."

"That'll be enough for me. I'll slip out as soon as everything is quiet. But do you go down again, if you can, and try and find out what your uncle is doing listening-in. It seems a most extraordinary proceeding in the middle of all the pandemonium."

Grace Seaton stole out silently with Dandy Leigh's little revolver, which she secreted in her bosom, the while the detective gradually divested himself of the last coil.

Little by little the noise about the household grew fainter and fainter; the radio concert ceased from Central Europe, and everything seemed quiet; but from the dull red glare issuing from Vernon Heathfield's private study it was evident that the great financier had not yet retired to rest.

Silently Leigh crept along the dark corridors, which the all-penetrating fog made into long horizontal flues, to a point above the study.

There were sounds of voices, but no longer angry, suggesting that the crooks had evidently arranged their differences and were endeavouring to thrash matters out.

Reassured that he could now move about with safety, Leigh groped his way back past his own door to where Grace Seaton had indicated the little winding staircase. This he found shut off by a small door,

locked, but yielding to a quick lever movement from the barrel of his automatic, and he climbed up.

In another instant Dandy Leigh found himself outside a door through which he could hear somebody moaning, as if in agony. He knocked, so as to prevent the occupant giving a cry of fear, and, upon receiving the query "Who's there?" quickly replied, "A friend."

There, sure enough, lay the figure of the convict, which Grace Seaton had described, his swollen and marked face giving but a slight indication of the mauling he must have received in the *mêlée*.

"Who are you?" said the wounded man, who lay trussed up in almost the identical manner in which Leigh had found himself trussed up.

"My name is Leigh—Inspector Dandy Leigh of Scotland Yard," replied Leigh. "I have just heard what has taken place in the lounge."

The man looked at him in amazement.

"How can that be? Surely you were not there?" he said, but Leigh soon put an end to this incredulity.

"Look here," said Leigh, "we've no time for explanations. Help me and I'll help you. And I can promise you you won't lose by it. But we must get Miss Seaton out of this place."

The man's eyes lit up.

"I'd do anything in the world for Grace Seaton. I knew her father. But I can tell you the men under Heathfield are desperate. They will pause at nothing, especially now, on the eve of their great *coup*."

"What do you mean by that?" said Leigh, but on second thoughts he added: "First of all, let me get you out of this mess." And for fully five minutes

the young detective tugged and sawed at the man's bonds.

At last, with a final wrench, the ropes gave way, and his man was free ; but even as the last strand fell to the ground they heard footsteps coming towards the room, and the two lay up behind the door, Leigh claspings his revolver. But, after satisfying himself that all was quiet, which was evidently the object of the unknown guard, the footsteps died away in the distance again, retreating, and the two held a hurried council of war.

"There are two things we must do," said the convict. "In the first place, we must prevent the signal going out from here ; and, in the second place, one of us must get to London and see the Home Secretary, but only after having seen that Grace Seaton is out of those devils' clutches."

The very idea of Grace Seaton remaining at Chippendale after what that evening had revealed sent a cold shiver through Dandy Leigh's spine, while he felt a hot rush of blood to his temples.

If any of them but dared to lay a single finger upon her ! And he felt his trigger-finger tighten upon the weapon in spite of himself.

The two men slowly made their way towards the portion of the old manor in which Grace's own rooms were situated when, outside, they heard the low hum of a motor-car making its way up the avenue.

A couple of seconds later, from one of the windows in the first floor corridor looking out on to the front, they could see the dull glare of the head-lights.

It only paused for a few seconds ; why, they could not quite make out ; but they heard the words,

"Careful. . . . Got her. . . . Away." And the next instant the car leaped forward into the pitch-black fog, and was swallowed up in its impenetrable immensity.

A minute later, Dandy Leigh, with the convict on guard at the end of the corridor, was knocking at the door of Grace Seaton's bedroom.

There came no answer. He knocked again, louder, and then, for fear of arousing anyone, walked in.

The whole place was in disorder—and the occupant gone !

CHAPTER XXV

The Two Citadels

LEIGH's heart gave a jump, and his first instinct was to rush blindly out into the night after the vehicle, but on second thoughts he realised the folly of such a proceeding.

The kidnapping of Grace Seaton was obviously the crooks' counterplot to her insistence upon remaining mistress in her own house, or had it a still more sinister purport? Poor Leigh went through a perfect agony of doubt, but what made it still worse was that he now felt himself torn between two loyalties—viz., his duty to the cause of law and order, and his duty to the woman he loved.

Luckily fate had sent him an adviser who, no less hostile to their common foe, had greater knowledge of their plans and methods.

Leigh, in fact, was going to leave the room occupied by Grace Seaton, when the ex-convict Dalton made a suggestion.

"I do not think that, now they have got the girl out of the way, and think we're trussed up like a couple of chickens, they will go prowling round the house again," said the convict. "They evidently wanted the place to themselves, and are now holding a council of war. Let's look round, and try and find out what made them suddenly decide on this. It's

not like them to leave this kind of thing to the last."

Leigh mentioned his last message to Grace Seaton, and the strange peculiarity of the radio interest shown by Vernon Heathfield.

" You sent her to find out ? " asked the convict.

" Yes," replied Leigh.

The two, electric torch in hand, made a round of the room. Everything was in disorder, indicating that there must have been a physical struggle ; curtains torn, chairs overturned, the bedding half on the floor, and the little revolver Leigh had given Grace on the mantelpiece.

What had happened ?

Obviously they had taken her by surprise after her return to her room, not before, or she would have used the revolver. Again, she would not have returned to her room without accomplishing that which Leigh had asked her to accomplish. The bed had not been occupied, for the dressing-table was the only part that seemed in order : all the brushes lying neatly ranged, showing that they had caught her before undressing.

Accordingly Dandy Leigh came to the conclusion that either she had hurriedly pretended to be asleep, or had tried to hide something from her captors, expecting nothing more than a reprimand in the same vein as Vernon Heathfield had administered already.

Leigh threw back the soft eiderdown, and there, half undone, was a long roll of music such as those used upon a pianola, with its tiny perforations all marked in pencil. He was about to discard this, however, as hardly relevant to the situation, when he noticed strange punctures at different points, all equi-distant, as if some drawing-pins had been used. These he

examined, and noted that they must all have been inserted from the back, for the holes presented a raised surface to his fingers as he ran his hand along.

What on earth had Heathfield been up to? And he drew Dalton's attention to his discovery.

"Can you make anything of this?" he asked the convict.

"That's no use to us now," he replied significantly, "unless we have the material to use with it."

"What do you mean?" said Leigh.

"I mean," replied Dalton, "that it's Heathfield's secret code key which he uses when receiving messages from the continent." And in a few words he explained how, placing manuscript which, to the ordinary observer, looked like printers' pie gone mad underneath the perforations, only certain letters would appear, and in this manner a regular service of directions could be circulated all over the world, the receivers getting the key by wireless.

At once the whole truth flashed into Dandy Leigh's mind: the pianola-player rolls at Mrs. Cranley Watson's; the Professor's mysterious manuscript; his panic after its loss; Grace Seaton's reference to Heathfield's habit of listening in, and his development of a taste for music.

"Good heavens!" he said. "There we've got them! I have several pages of Estankraft's manuscript in my suit-case." And without more ado the two made their way back to Leigh's room.

There, to his amazement, as he pinned the sheets to the music-roll, the whole secret lay revealed before him, the hotch-potch disappearing and the messages appearing letter by letter almost as clearly as a telegram.

" Imperative . . . loot no longer delayed than first fog. . . . Everything ready for receiving. . . . Plans complete for Gerolstein's alibi. . . . Dismantle power-stations as per arrangement . . ." And so on, ending up with a renewed insistence upon the absolute necessity of getting Ladman's secret archives out of Scotland Yard, even at the cost of bloodshed.

It seemed too stupendous to be true, too impossible to conceive ; but, after the events which Dandy Leigh had witnessed for the past few weeks, everything seemed to endorse it.

If only he had been able to discover the precious clue before—which seemed so obvious now—and laid it before the Home Secretary ! But, even then, would he have believed it ? Would the story not rather have been looked upon as but another proof of his supposed insanity ?

Here, however, he found a new endorsement in the shape of Dalton's " clean breast " of the great conspiracy—a revelation which the latter had only decided upon making after this final proof of Griggs's determination to throw over Carmen.

" As a matter of fact," said the convict, " I had intended merely to seek a personal revenge but now it's different. I gave them their chance, they would not listen. Now I'm prepared to blow the gaff on the whole gang of swine . . . it's only a question whether we shall be in time."

" We can escape and make our way to the nearest police station," said Leigh, whose first thought was to get aid at once, and warn London. But he was speaking without a full knowledge of the facts.

" It would be perfectly useless," said Dalton. " You

have no idea of the extent of this conspiracy. It's all directed from Chippendale, and, unless we can prevent the signal going forth, there will be chaos and pandemonium in London. And God only knows what bloodshed ! ”

The man was right. Leigh had had sufficient proof that Chippendale Manor, the lovely old-world residence that looked so peaceful and quiet, was nothing less than a fortress, and then the thought struck him. If Ladman had been able to capture the stronghold of law and order, why should he not turn the tables, and capture the citadel of crime and disorder ?

They were only two, 'tis true, but Scotland Yard had fallen into the hands of one. But before doing anything else he decided to make a desperate attempt to find out the exact stage which the great conspiracy had reached, for he would then be in a better position to give the warning to the authorities.

Alone, he could certainly have achieved nothing, but, with his new-found colleague, the two might just be able to pull it off, one holding up the secret assembly gathered for the last time to receive their final orders from the mysterious chief, while the other went forth for help. And it just so happened that it was not merely the last meeting, but a complete gathering of every one of the household, the arrival of the convict having been all but the signal for a *sauve qui peut*, so great had been the panic he produced.

Hastily wrapping some stray pieces of silk about their feet to prevent their boots from making a noise, the two crept down towards Vernon Heathfield's study, which luckily occupied the ground floor, and formed the end of one of the wings of the old mansion,

with no other approach than through the picture gallery.

Leigh chuckled to himself as he realised this.

"With any luck," he whispered to Dalton, "we have them all bagged as securely as rats in a trap." And the two deliberated on the best way of accomplishing their purpose.

Dalton, it was arranged, should at a given moment enter and try to hold them in conversation, as if he had changed his mind and was pretending to be willing to come to terms. Leigh would then follow, and, revolver in hand, hold them up. After this, Dalton would reveal his true intentions, and, disarming them singly, finally take charge of the weapons, and hold them as prisoners, trusting to Leigh's intervention on his own behalf when the time came for justice to take its course.

Dandy Leigh was prepared to be surprised at what he would hear—but not for such a gigantic surprise as he now experienced.

Even before the two reached the closed door of the great financier's study the sounds of angry voices clearly betrayed that the meeting had got out of hand.

Who and what the individuals were, outside their functions within the Chippendale household, Dandy Leigh could not tell; he only knew from the tone of their voices that the outer semblance of their positions could not have been the real ones.

Heathfield was to all intents and purposes their master; he was still trying to be from the vigorous invective that accompanied what must have been his commands, but it was evident that his followers were

not prepared to be his slaves, and wanted a leader of a more democratic type.

The first voice which Dandy Leigh recognised was that of the butler, but the note of servility which had characterised his manner in the dining-room was chiefly notable by its absence.

"I say it's impossible!" he thundered. "It's too late! It's been bungled from the very start! The authorities are suspicious. That man Leigh knows—I'm convinced he knows that we have got Ladman here. I always said this mad scheme of impersonation would never work."

"Bah! Wasn't the Home Secretary convinced the fellow was mad? Who'd believe him, anyway?" interjected one who was obviously taking the crook leader's part.

The words "Ladman here" staggered Leigh. Ladman alive and safe somewhere in the old mansion! And he felt a prayer of thanks going up from the depths of his heart to his Maker. "Thank God! At last!" It was the final endorsement of months of reasoning: the almost impossible conclusion to which every fact had been pointing, with ever-growing cogency. And, breathless with excitement, the young detective placed his ear closer to the door.

Indeed, it was all that he could do to restrain himself from bursting in upon the assembly, and demanding that they should deliver him up without another second's delay; but he realised that there was another issue involved.

He must probe their secret to the full depth of its iniquity. He must find out every detail of the conspiracy, and the method in which it was to be directed

from Chippendale, if there was to be any hope of frustrating it.

Even at that very moment it might be too late, and, with his whole being aflame with suppressed emotion, he listened on as Vernon Heathfield fought on for his diminishing authority.

"You pack of cowards! You set of damned fools!" he said. "Don't you know it's too late to go back now? Don't you know that only a week before his holiday—indeed the very reason for his holiday—information reached him——"

"Who by? Who was the traitor?" cried several voices together.

Vernon Heathfield's voice changed in tone, and, from where Dandy Leigh was standing, he thought he could distinguish a slight tremor in its notes.

"One," said Heathfield slowly, "who has already gone to her reckoning."

The word "her" stabbed into his soul like a sword-point. There was a short silence following the announcement more eloquent than any words. Her—a woman, whose treason had been discovered only a week before. Great heavens! Leigh saw it all now! The first tragedy of Chippendale! So it had cost her her life, and her death had apparently been made to serve a double purpose, for Heathfield went on:

"As a matter of fact, it was just as well, for I doubt whether anything else would have enabled us to get Sir Thomas Ladman into our hands."

The sheer callousness, the diabolical brutality of it all, froze Leigh's blood in his veins.

"Let the dead bury their dead," said the butler. "What we want to know is what is going to happen

now, and how we can save our own necks from the noose."

"How often must I repeat," replied Vernon Heathfield, "that it's too late to retreat. We have sworn to our friends overseas that we will get hold of the Ladman dossier that he intended to lay before the League of Nations, and if we do not——"

"Damn the bloody foreigners! It's a mistake we ever got mixed up with them!" said a typically British voice.

"Again," replied Heathfield, "I say it is too late in the day to come to that conclusion. You want your loot, you must have your receivers, and Ladman has made receiving practically impossible in England."

"Then it means you've given us over to those foreign bastards?"

"We've given ourselves. But they will only turn against us if we turn against them," replied the crook financier. "Or, putting it another way, we can only save ourselves by saving them."

"That's all very well," came the voice of the butler. "But you promised us it would be as simple as pie. Once get Gerolstein into Scotland Yard, and all he would have to do would be to press a button, and the whole bally doings would be handed to him." But here Heathfield interposed.

"Yes, and who was it linked up the idea of looting during the first big fog—but yourselves!"

"That's not true," replied the butler. "Or, if it's true, it was at Griggs's suggestion, and now he's letting us carry the baby while he goes on his honeymoon."

At this latter reference, Dandy Leigh gnashed his teeth in impotence. He wanted to be, and indeed had need to be, in half a dozen different places at once—with the Home Secretary, with Sir Thomas Ladman, with Grace Seaton—he did not know which call was the most urgent.

Again there was a spell of pandemonium, during which Heathfield was vainly striving to restore order.

"I tell you, we're between the devil and the deep blue sea. We've got to decide one way or the other. Gerolstein ought to be at Scotland Yard first thing in the morning, and Zitinoff and Estankraft will be taking over their side of the business. It'll take at least two hours, they tell me, before they can open the safe, and then everything must be made right for the get-away before the fog lifts, and, unless we can get Ladman back to Wimbledon in the same time, everything is lost."

There was what Leigh and Dalton interpreted as a sullen act of consent, but the lack of enthusiasm was very marked.

"And the loot?" came a voice which had not spoken before.

"As to that," said Heathfield, "everything will depend upon the signal, which will be despatched from here the moment everything is safe." But there was a curious lack of assurance in his voice which was not lost upon the conspirators.

It was their share of the swag—the high diplomacy of crime was his—and Leigh could picture to himself their state of mind as it appeared as if they were to be robbed of their share. But what a colossal bait!

The loot of London ! With, in addition to the covering of fog, the dislocation of the main lighting system of the great metropolis . . . truly the conception of a master mind of crime.

There was a sound of movement in the study as if the meeting was drawing to a close, and once more they heard the voice of Vernon Heathfield :

" Remember," he said in the voice of one who has gained a victory over mutineers, " there can be no going back. The secret information which my wife gave to Ladman, luckily in code, is enough to give us penal servitude for life. Our victory means the defeat of Scotland Yard as an international force by the loss of its national prestige."

The words were hardly out of his mouth, and Dalton was about to seek admission as arranged, when the door suddenly opened.

It was too late for the convict to go through his agreed part. Another second and it would have been too late even to surprise them, but luckily Leigh kept cool. He saw what was happening. Vernon Heathfield, with the bombast of the professional bravo, was about to administer the oath to his henchmen, and every hand went up.

" You swear to be true ? " said the financier.

" We swear ! " came the immediate reply.

The very same instant Dandy Leigh, accompanied by Dalton, sprang forward.

" Keep your hands up and your heads turned ! " cried the young detective, at the same time levelling his own automatic at the leader's head.

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But if Dandy Leigh thought in that moment he had

nipped the world's greatest conspiracy in the bud, he was premature ; for already the forces of disorder were marching to the siege of Scotland Yard.

He might have momentarily seized their citadel, but they, in the meanwhile, had captured his.

CHAPTER XXVI

The Accident

As the cars containing Sir Thomas Ladman, Doctor Frybury, and the Home Secretary made their way Londonwards, Sir Keeble Fentworth began to go over the events of the past hour or so in his mind.

Suddenly the chauffeur of Doctor Frybury, whose car was travelling some fifty yards or so behind his, gave a long toot on his horn. Fentworth felt his own chauffeur move out to the right. The car behind gave a second toot, and, glancing round, the Home Secretary was alarmed to see the lights of the doctor's car growing bigger and bigger through the fog. Before he could shout a warning to his own chauffeur there was a deafening roar, as the physician's car flashed by at lightning speed, a quick swerve, again to the right, by his chauffeur, and the next moment he felt his car leave the road and pitch forward with a jerk, another second and it had turned over into a ditch. Then everything went blank, and he swooned away.

Five minutes later Morecombe, racing towards Chippendale, brought his huge racing Mercedes to a sudden stop beside the wreckage.

"Good God! What's that?" said the detective to his companion as he jumped out on to the grass.

The scene spoke for itself: an upturned car, with engine racing, lights still on, and the fumes of petrol smiting the nostrils; and, inside, the figure of a man in full evening dress, bleeding at the temples, and pinned helplessly beneath a twisted front seat.

Morecombe's first thought was the danger of fire.

"Quick!" he shouted. "The Pyrex in case of accident, and turn our spotlights on to here!" at the same time feeling for the switch.

The switch moved round, but there was no corresponding break in the current, and in another second Morecombe had whipped out a jack-knife and severed the wire. At once the roar ceased and the engine began to slow down, and, as his companion brought the head-lights of the Mercedes on to the body of the upturned Daimler, a cry of horror escaped him.

"Heavens alive! That's Fentworth, the Home Secretary! The very man we want!"

To break open the door, which had jammed, wrench the steel brackets of the twisted seat that held his leg as in a vice, and extricate the unfortunate man was the work of a few minutes, but it was not a second too soon. For they had hardly stretched the figure of Sir Keeble Fentworth, still unconscious, upon the ground at a safe distance from the car, when the whole machine burst into flames.

Evidently their movements must have sent a tiny stream of petrol on to some overheated bearing which had become red-hot while the engine raced. The glare seemed to turn the fog for a hundred yards around into a cloud of blood-red mist, and the waters around into pools of that vital liquid; but, even though they sprayed the whole contents of their patent extinguisher

on to the flames, the conflagration was too spread out for it to be effective.

What a providence !

Morecombe mopped his brow, which was covered with thick beads of perspiration, as he thought of the narrow margin of circumstance which had induced him to plunge through the fog in answer to Dandy Leigh's mysterious message from Chippendale. He had really intended nothing more than to get in touch with the local police under some pretext or other, late as it was, in order to get to the root of the many rumours which had reached him through the mediumship of Carmen's revenge upon Griggs, and see how far they might be endorsed by proof, before laying them before Sir Keeble Fentworth for what they were worth.

Just at this moment Sir Keeble Fentworth came round.

"Where am I? What has happened? Where is the chauffeur?" he gasped.

"Don't worry, Sir Keeble, you are in good hands."

"Who are you?" said the Cabinet Minister, whose mind went back to the dramatic events which had so crowded in upon him in such rapid succession that night.

"My name is Morecombe, sir—Inspector Morecombe of Scotland Yard, and Jimmy Glyn, an old army pal—not in the force, but one of the best."

A look of reassurance took the place of the terror which still lingered in his eyes as he had come out of his swoon.

"They tried to murder me," he said. "I'm sure now that fellow was not the chauffeur they sent me from the Daimler Hire Company."

A few words of explanation from both sides followed, Sir Keeble Fentworth narrating briefly the incidents of the evening, Morecombe, on the other hand, not merely revealing a knowledge of what had taken place, but producing Dandy Leigh's warning, written in anticipation.

Five minutes later the Home Secretary had so far regained his strength as to enter enthusiastically into the ruse for trying to capture the man who had nearly succeeded in killing him.

"If I am wrong, the fellow must by this time have secured help and be on his way back," said Sir Keeble Fentworth, "and we can judge him by his conduct on seeing his handiwork."

The two helped the old man into the big Mercedes ; Morecombe, having explored the neighbourhood, found a convenient spot, sheltered from view by one of those isolated shrubs dotted about the Surrey commons. They then extinguished their lights, turned off the engine, and waited.

They had hardly waited ten minutes before a dull hum was heard, coming from the direction of Chippendale. A few seconds later a couple of faint lights were seen, battling with the thick November fog. Then followed three consecutive notes of a peculiarly deep tone on a klaxon, and the very next instant they could see, clearly silhouetted against the flaming car, the figure of a man who appeared to have come from nowhere.

Morecombe and Glyn crept forward on their hands and knees, as no-man's-land had taught them in the old days in Flanders, and watched.

The figure seemed to gloat over the tragedy, which

he evidently considered complete. There could be no doubt that this was their man.

At last, with a shrug of his shoulders, he turned to make his way back to his waiting car.

At the same instant Morecombe and his companion rushed forward, a quick, sharp blow upon the back of the head with the butt of his revolver, and the fellow measured his length upon the road. At once the driver, realising danger, put his foot upon the accelerator of the still moving car, but not before Morecombe's companion had jumped upon the running-board.

There was a struggle as the fellow tried to whip out an automatic, which went off into his own leg before he could level it to above the steering-wheel with one hand and throw off his antagonist with the other. So successful was the latter manœuvre that Morecombe had to rush to the rescue to prevent his falling beneath the front wheels. But even as he did so he noticed a figure in the back of the car, which was an open tourer—the figure of a girl, bound and gagged, and he recognised it.

It was the figure of Grace Seaton, and her captor was no other than Griggs, Vernon Heathfield's chauffeur.

Turning his attention, therefore, upon the driver, Morecombe gave a leap at him and clutched him round the neck, and, as his fingers closed upon his throat, he felt himself lifted bodily from the ground and dragged through the air as the giant car sprang forward.

Even as it was, it seemed a miracle that the car had not overturned as Morecombe hoisted himself behind the chauffeur, and the latter, abandoning the idea of

flight, tried to bring the car to a standstill. Luckily this gave the detective a momentary respite, which he used to take a knife from his pocket and, with a couple of slashing strokes, sever the bonds of the crook's fair prisoner. Unfortunately, the latter seized this opportunity to make a grab at the detective's revolver.

Needless to say, Morecombe could have shot the fellow through the head, but, knowing the importance of Griggs as a possible witness in the Chippendale mystery, he refrained, and a terrible struggle ensued, during which the car swerved off the road and careered aimlessly over the flat common, turning from side to side, as the steering-wheel was left to itself. But they were now two to one, for Grace Seaton, taking the knife from Morecombe's hands, had hastily freed herself and came to the rescue of her hard-pressed champion.

The detective, meanwhile, had managed to put a ju-jutsu grip on to Griggs's wrist, though not before a volley of shots had gone through the wind-screen, a couple actually going through his coat-sleeve—and in another movement Morecombe would have broken the fellow's arm ; the next instant Griggs was begging for mercy.

The car was now at a standstill, though the engine still raced on like mad, and, having turned off the ignition, Morecombe allowed the chauffeur to get out.

It was only then that Griggs really recognised his captor.

" Good God ! I'm done ! " were his first words. And, from the look of terror upon his face, Morecombe could see that the fellow realised that the game was up.

Giving Grace Seaton time to refill the chamber of his revolver, he kept the same iron grip upon the fellow's

wrist, and then, as she levelled the newly loaded weapon at her late captor's head, Morecombe told him to hold his hands above his head, and proceeded to search him, and then—such is the irony of fate—proceeded to tie him up with the self-same cords he had used on the woman.

The whole operation was accomplished in silence, for it was no time for words. Then, when they had forced him into the back seat, and there tied his feet together, Morecombe and Grace Seaton reviewed the situation.

In a few words she told Morecombe of the events which had taken place at Chippendale ; of her discovery of her uncle's decoding cipher ; and how, just as she had hoped to reveal this to Dandy Leigh, she had been overpowered in her room and kidnapped in the way he had found her.

Morecombe, on the other hand, described the terrible experience through which the Home Secretary had passed, and it was only then that Griggs ventured to speak.

Knowing that he was trapped, the idea occurred to him that he might still escape by a ruse.

With a last-minute display of courage he threw out his bait.

" You think you've won, don't you, by my capture ? " said the chauffeur, with a sneer. " But a pawn is well worth a knight. It's a game with more moves than one to win."

The analogy was not lost upon Morecombe.

" Quick ! " he said to Grace Seaton. " We must get back to where Sir Keeble Fentworth is waiting, and, once he is safe, give the alarm."

As a matter of fact, Morecombe had left his companion at a singular disadvantage. The blow which had knocked down the crook had only laid him out momentarily, and, quickly recovering, the latter had been able to throw himself on the fallen man, over one of whose legs the back wheel of the car had passed.

What had happened after that Morecombe could only conjecture. Evidently Sir Keeble Fentworth must have heard the sound of the revolver shot, run to the rescue, and been overpowered. For, as Grace Seaton and her rescuer came to the spot, they found the two men lying side by side a couple of yards or so from what remained of the burning Daimler, the Home Secretary unconscious.

Jumping out of the car, Morecombe soon learnt the truth. The crook had managed to turn the tables upon his would-be captors, and, seizing their car, had evidently rushed back to give the warning to Chippendale.

There was a cynical laugh that came from Griggs, and Morecombe remembered his boast :

“ A pawn is worth a knight.”

True, the detective had managed to secure the private secretary of Vernon Heathfield, but there, with a great gash across his forehead, unconscious, lay the figure of Sir Keeble Fentworth, so that, even though he might be in time to give the warning, it was still a question whether the Cabinet Minister would be in a state to receive it, much less act upon it, before the final assault upon Scotland Yard had become an accomplished fact.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Greatest Burglary in History

THE last trains, the last tubes, the last buses, the last trams, had gone, and the distracted drivers mopped their brows in thankfulness that they were still alive ; for by general consent it had been the worst fog in their experience.

The past thirty hours had taxed human endurance itself, and, as Zitinoﬀ had remarked shortly before his call to the Yard, " anyone could have London for the asking." But those who had been singled out for the great raid which was to take place simultaneously all over the metropolis still crouched beside their wireless receivers, listening for the signal which was to release them like dogs from the leash.

Only in four or five spots might a lonely constable, ostensibly in control of some great power-station, have witnessed strange slouching figures moving towards the entrances, and peeping in at the doorways whence emerged the sound of the droning dynamos, and even these seemed to be asleep and snoring, their passive guardians looking on from a distance like nurses . . . and still the fog kept on.

Meanwhile, at the Yard the staff had been reduced to the very minimum required for the performance of its essential duties, and, as additional leave of absence

had been granted at the special suggestion of the Assistant Commissioner, it may well be imagined that Sir Thomas Ladman had rendered his supreme task as easy as it could possibly be.

That he had determined to work far into the night was known, but not envied. Indeed, it was thought typical of the Chief's well-known regard for others that he had excused those who would otherwise have been in attendance on him. He had left word that when the "representatives from the Foreign Office"—a definition not untinged with irony—called, they should be brought up to him direct, while any workmen should be directed below, though no secret was made of their purpose.

As far as the Yard was concerned, it was an open secret ; in other words, the precautions were ostensibly being taken against the general public. Hence the cuteness of the Chief to choose a time when even the crooks themselves would hardly suspect that Scotland Yard was awake . . . if anyone thought that crooks would choose a night like this to go out in.

So thought the tired janitors of Scotland Yard as, duly summoned by secret messenger, Zitinoff and Estankraft, disguised as experts from a German-American firm of safe-makers, handed in their credentials, all duly endorsed on Foreign Office notepaper, without speaking a word. Almost at the same time Sir Thomas Ladman, peering down through a long telescopic tube, that rendered the signal invisible to any but the occupant of the Commissioner of Police's rooms, on to the Thames, noticed a treble light flash come from the middle of the river.

"At last!" said the Chief to himself, as the house

'phone rang. "At last! I thought they would never come!"

"The men from the Foreign Office, Sir Thomas," came the message along the wire, while the sound of a heavy motor coming in from the Whitehall gate told its own story.

If the worst came to the worst and there was danger by land, then there was a safe exit down the Thames, and none of the river police would ever suspect one of their own launches, or follow it, if it gave the proper signals, to where Zitinoff had arranged for them to pick up Heathfield's yacht.

Meanwhile the official lorry would disgorge its unofficial guests when the right time came . . . but as an additional precaution it might be better to close the gates.

Accordingly, as Sir Thomas Ladman told them to admit the workmen, he added:

"Oh, and close the gates!"

The answer came back that the order would be obeyed, and the great open portals that are so familiar to Londoners, were closed, Ladman thought, against the interference of his enemies.

For it never struck him that at the same time he might be cutting himself off from his friends, or, worse still, from his own freedom.

The siege of Scotland Yard, however, was soon to take another aspect from that which the besiegers originally intended.

It was a strange interview which now took place in the famous room of the Commissioner of Police overlooking the bridge, surely without precedent in all the varied history of Scotland Yard.

One look at the faces of the two as they were introduced by one of the minor officials told him that something was wrong, but what it was he could not guess.

The moment they were alone, however, Zitinoff said, but with an ill-disguised attempt to remain calm :

" Are you sure it's safe ? "

Ladman, who knew that everything depended now on confidence, and who, truth to tell, was rather elated over his own successes, pretended to be surprised, ready at the same time to turn bully if he saw any signs of cowardice. After all, these men had him in their power in a much truer sense than he had them.

Did they realise it ?

Their disguises were certainly perfect. The Professor's beard had entirely disappeared ; Estankraft, on the other hand, had developed premature baldness. They could have passed through a crowd of detectives unrecognised.

" Look here," began Ladman, " it's no good getting the wind up at this stage. What on earth makes you lose your nerve ? " And, pointing to the river, he added, " Even if they were to cut us off by land, we have still another way out."

The two, however, did not seem reassured.

" There is still no news of Griggs, and he was to have left Chippendale with the last confirmation at latest by noon," said Estankraft.

This announcement sent a cold shudder down the spine of Gerolstein. Griggs was the one man they had always doubted, ever since his break with Carmen had revealed to them that he was anxious to leave their ranks and " get into society " by a marriage with Grace Seaton. Griggs, too, had charge of the alibi

upon which his whole future safety depended : namely, the return of the real Sir Thomas Ladman to his home in Wimbledon before the morning.

It was too terrible a thought to entertain as a possibility even at this juncture, and Ladman made a supreme effort to nip his growing fear in the bud.

"Nonsense. Nonsense. You'll find everything is all right. Remember, if we each do our own jobs it is all we have got to bother about."

The two still prepared to argue the point, and Ladman, carrying his bluff into his own camp, determined to break all danger of insubordination in the only manner possible—by lying.

"If you want to know," he said brazenly, "I've heard from Griggs. Everything is going according to schedule. Heathfield was afraid if the rank and file heard of this they'd make helter-skelter for the swag before we had secured the secret of the safe. So they've purposely delayed it till we send our message out."

Zitinoff, who was higher up in the gang than Gerolstein, here picked up the challenge.

"You're lying, Gerolstein! You know you're lying!"

Ladman, who knew that if they liked they could have called his bluff, here took the bull by the horns.

Drawing out a revolver from his private desk, he levelled it to the height of his blotting-pad, at the same time taking care to press the secret bell at his foot, and the next instant an official appeared, only the fraction of a second after the chief's drawer had closed on the weapon.

"Show these gentlemen down to the strong-room,"

he said, "and give them every assistance they need. If necessary, clear everybody out of the building—I mean, if they find it necessary to employ the special high-power gas with the poisonous fumes."

For it must be explained here that the latter detail, though purely fictitious, had been one of the tricks which the gang had counted upon to make sure of the complete evacuation of the most important block of the two buildings, which, as everyone knows, is spanned by the well-known bridge.

The two knew that they were part of the machine, and that, like a wheel, the line of least resistance and greatest safety is always to play its intended part in the whole, as alone and detached they could only expect to be ground to pieces between the cogs of the rest.

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A brief survey of the secret vaults which the great safe had been literally built in showed them that it would be no easy task. It was a case of either demolishing the brickwork, with the danger of interfering with the foundation of the superstructure, or else sitting down with half a dozen cylinders and playing a stream of fire upon the doors, goodness knew for how long.

The Yankee who had originally installed it had laughingly guaranteed it "against Mount Vesuvius trying to beat Stromboli in the world championship contest between volcanoes." But it was not the physical torture of standing behind the men to direct operations that terrified the two master crooks; it was the fear of being caught like rats in a trap if things went wrong at Chippendale. They had volunteered for the job because they had looked upon it as the

safest exit for themselves as guardians of the great treasure they were seeking. But now a new fear was gripping them—the fear that not only Griggs, but Gerolstein, was playing them false.

What, for example, was to prevent Sir Thomas Ladman—as to all the world their colleague was—from making a bolt for it at the first signal of failure, without burdening himself with their fate and the fate of the men in overalls whom the two expert safe-breakers had brought with them? Against them the gates would form an impassable hindrance to escape. A dash towards the Embankment to a waiting launch, and Gerolstein was safe!

Yet, in justice to themselves, it must be admitted that, once they had overcome their mental fears of treason, neither Zitinoff nor Estankraft betrayed any fear in their handling of their subordinates; and they realised to the full the risk they would have to run when it came to striking the last blow for their freedom and capturing the Yard physically, if necessary.

Apart from the presence of an ordinary Government van, however, and the presence of a driver who appeared to be asleep at the wheel out of sheer lassitude, everything presented a normal appearance in Scotland Yard—that is, where the fog allowed any appearance at all. And all the while some half-dozen or more were taking turn about, holding the scorching flame to the metal with blistered hands, in spite of asbestos gloves and steel protectors.

Little by little a thin stream of white-hot metal began to flow down; while above presented the appearance of a hundred Crystal Palace firework nights knocked into one.

From time to time Sir Thomas Ladman would come down to note progress, returning to his room again to hang upon the telephone. But as the optimism of the workers grew stronger and stronger, the pessimism of Gerolstein was likewise increasing to the verge of positive agony.

"Well, well, how are things, Mr. Marks?" said the Chief, addressing Estankraft after fully an hour had elapsed.

"Another half-hour, sir, and I think everything will be right in our hands," replied the Professor, with utmost confidence. Then, in a whisper of deadly diffidence: "And you, sir, what have you to report?"

But Gerolstein was silent.

Little wonder, too, that he was silent, for it was as much as his life was worth to breathe a word of the thoughts that were passing through his mind as the precious moments flew by, and his anxiety began to grow into a state rapidly verging on hysteria.

He only wondered that the whole conspiracy had not collapsed altogether before this, after what he had witnessed at Chippendale, and who could tell how events had turned out there since his own departure?

What was actually happening was this.

Dandy Leigh and his new ally thought at first that it would be an easy thing for them to hold the crook conclave at bay at the point of the revolver.

Heathfield allowed them to think so. The young detective had reckoned upon the supposition that the whole of the financier's staff had assembled in the "cul-de-sac" library. Heathfield allowed him to suppose so.

"And what do you propose to do now?" said the financier, trying to bluff it to the end. "Do you still hold to your mad idea about your Chief?"

Dandy Leigh smiled.

"What I propose to do now, Mr. Heathfield, is what I have been trying to do for weeks."

"And that is?"

"Find the real Sir Thomas Ladman," replied the other. "And you are going to show me where he is."

Heathfield had been expecting this request, for by this time he had realised that the young detective had guessed his secret; but he had still one arrow in his quiver, and he prepared to use it.

Possibly Leigh might have noticed that his reply came in somewhat louder tones. If so, he did not realise the full purpose of the raised voice.

"You seem to think Sir Thomas Ladman disappeared in my house the night of his first visit," said the financier. "If so, you are at liberty to come up to the room he occupied and see for yourself the absurdity of your suggestion."

This meant that Leigh would have to accompany him alone through the deserted house; but he did not dread it. He would leave the convict in charge of the gang, and then come down again after having satisfied himself one way or another.

Heathfield seemed to be trembling like an aspen leaf as he led the way, his hands lifted high up into the air above his head, one holding a silver candlestick, before Leigh, as the latter followed him, revolver in hand, first through the lounge, with its furniture strewn about in confusion, then up the great staircase and on

through the silent picture gallery, towards the "Queen's room," as it was called.

Heathfield asked to be allowed to lower his hands to open the quaint lock, with its huge key, and Leigh allowed him to do so.

It seemed difficult to turn, and made a strange clanking noise as the financier took the key in both hands; and Leigh might have noticed that the sound echoed through the building.

The next instant the two were in the old musty royal suite, with its four-poster bed and tapestries and curtains.

"Look for yourself," said the financier, shrugging his shoulders. "It was in this room and this bed that Sir Thomas Ladman slept, and where he was going to sleep again last night when——"

But at that moment Dandy Leigh thought that there was a slight rustle of silk in one of the curtains.

Without wishing to turn round, Leigh looked into the mirror, so as to catch the reflection of what was going on behind him. Even as he did so he thought he heard the click of a sliding panel, and, before he could turn round, some heavy object came hurtling through the air, knocked the candlestick out of Heathfield's hand, plunging the place into darkness, and the next thing Leigh found was that his revolver had been wrenched out of his hand, and that a couple of heavy figures were pinning him to the floor.

Even as they were struggling, however, there came the sound of a distant motor-horn, evidently belonging to a car that was coming up the avenue. Then it seemed to Leigh that there was a movement of panic in his captors as the horn gave three long plaintive notes.

The grip of his captors instantly relaxed.

"God! There's no time! It's too late! It's the *sauve qui peut!*" Leigh heard Heathfield exclaim.

His heart gave a throb of joy. But the next moment he felt a crashing blow with some soft but tremendously heavy object, like a sandbag, and the next instant everything was darkness.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Victory in the Balance

DANDY LEIGH awoke back to consciousness to find himself lying prostrate in what appeared to him to be an old dungeon.

As his eyes grew accustomed to the semi-darkness of the place, he became aware of a gaunt figure of a man leaning over him.

"Where am I . . . who are you, why am I here?" were the first questions that came to his lips.

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than the figure replied :

"Heavens—Leigh!"

There was no need for the young detective to ask for a name ; with a thrill of joy, he recognised the voice—it was that of Sir Thomas Ladman.

"Thank God—Chief—it's you!"

It is not often that two Englishmen give way to emotion ; but if ever there was an occasion that justified it, surely it was this.

Tears welled up simultaneously in both their eyes ; with trembling hands the two friends clasped each other in all but an embrace.

Leigh in his enthusiasm tried to rise, but he was evidently too weak, for the next instant he had fallen back into the arms of the Commissioner of Police.

"Quietly boy, quietly . . . take your time . . . don't

hurry." And from a cup the captive Chief made him drink a little Oxo, for the crooks had taken every care of their prisoner, since to have done otherwise would only have meant catastrophe to their plans.

Leigh, however, would not be quietened. He knew only too well that "If they must do anything, they must do it quickly."

"We must get out of this at once, Chief," he said, feeling new strength flowing through his veins, partly the effect of the beverage, and partly that of his renewed confidence and hope. "We have not a minute to lose—every second may mean millions of property, and, if there is any trouble, hundreds of lives."

"Do you not think that I know this only too well?" replied Sir Thomas Ladman. "After all these days and nights——" But he had evidently lost all count of those distinctions.

In as few words as possible Dandy Leigh narrated the chief points in the events of the past few weeks, laying greater stress upon those of the last five minutes in power.

Sir Thomas Ladman shook his head; for the narration of the last struggle seemed to sap every ounce of hope from his heart.

The dungeon in which they found themselves confined was a long, quadrangular chamber, which, from its disposition, elongated in one direction, must have stretched far into the courtyard, with its pool of water in front of the house with the quaint fountain in the centre looking like a hollow shaft.

The Chief had guessed the purport of this latter. A blow and the room could be flooded like a reservoir,

and the unknown victims drowned like rats—or would it be one more of those mysterious country house fires ; for Sir Thomas Ladman had recognised the *sauf qui peut* signal of the motor-car and the revolver shots that followed almost immediately afterwards—noise coming in, but not out of, the dungeon, or, rather, probably the report reverberating through the thick vault foundations as in a sound box.

What had happened—and how long ago : that was what Dandy Leigh was wondering in his mind, and then his thoughts went out to the scattered details of the great drama which, for all they knew, might be actually taking place in London at that very moment.

If only they could get out, and, if they once got out, make their way to Scotland Yard in time to prevent the great catastrophe.

The loot of a great city is always terrible : the loot of London would not bear even thinking of—but, strangely enough, Sir Thomas Ladman showed no fear of this.

“ If, as you tell me,” he said, “ Sir Keeble Fentworth has had his suspicions roused, he has merely to press a button and the capital can be closed like a gigantic safe.”

Leigh seemed staggered at the thought. The Chief seemed to have foreseen the whole affair ; but, unfortunately, to foresee was one thing, to forestall was another. And, as the two friends sat huddled together for warmth, Sir Thomas Ladman unfolded the great plan he had prepared.

There was an invisible force—a Secret Squad—all recruited from the most trusted of the men, whose devotion to duty had been tested on the field of battle

and who could be trusted not to allow that to be lost in peace for which they had bled in war.

It only needed the signal and every road, every highway round London—but why enlarge upon it when the hand that would have given that signal was in the power of the enemy, and the only other brain that Ladman had allowed to know the secret was numbed almost to insensibility on the roadside.

Meanwhile Morecombe and Grace Seaton were standing by the still unconscious Sir Keeble Fentworth and wondering what was best to be done.

From what Grace Seaton had told him, Morecombe knew that Dandy Leigh must by now be in a pretty tight corner, but before they could go to his rescue they must make some arrangements for the care of the Home Secretary and the man whom Morecombe had brought down with him. Surely there must be a cottage or a house somewhere about, if only the damned fog would clear so that they could see. Well, the first thing to do was to get the two men into Griggs's car and then go slowly along the road until they came to some place. Once be sure that they could be left with safety, and he would be off to the help of Dandy Leigh.

Quickly he gave the girl an outline of his plan.

"You won't find that damned detective at Chippendale," broke in Griggs from his place at the back of the car. He had overheard what Morecombe had been saying.

"Oh, and why not?" The detective was suspicious.

"Because Heathfield's got him."

"And where is Heathfield?"

"Southend—on his yacht—that's unless he's sailed already."

For a few seconds Morecombe and Grace Seaton looked at each other, wondering whether the fellow was telling the truth—the odds seemed even either way. It might be a trick to get them away from London in the hopes of yet again turning the tables on his captors. On the other hand, it seemed such an ideal exit for a man living on the brink of arrest that it appeared to bear the stamp of probability upon the face of it.

"I ain't lying," went on Griggs, who could feel the doubt the other two had of him. "I'm telling you the truth. I ain't no fool—I can see the game's up, and, if I help you now, I'll expect you to make it easy for me afterwards."

There was certainly something in that. By turning King's evidence Griggs would expect to be let off lightly at his trial. Therefore it would pay him to tell the truth now.

Telling Grace Seaton to keep Griggs covered with the revolver, and at the same time warning the man himself what to expect if he tried any games on, Morecombe untied his prisoner, and ordered him to give a hand in lifting Sir Keeble Fentworth and the other man into the car.

Luckily not half a mile along the road they observed a light which they discovered came from a cottage. Morecombe pulled up outside with a sigh of relief. The owner not only promised to do all he could for the wounded men, but at once sent his son off to the nearest doctor, begging him to come at once. Morecombe wrote a note explaining matters to Sir Keeble Fentworth, which was to be given him the moment he

regained consciousness. And now, having thoroughly satisfied himself that the two men would be looked after, he felt himself free to go to the rescue of Dandy Leigh.

Grace Seaton insisted that she should go with him, and, although he didn't like to drag her into what looked like danger, he was nevertheless thankful that she did insist, for he wanted Griggs free to be able to guide him on their arrival at Southend, and by himself he would have had to tie the man up. With Grace Seaton as his companion, he could make different arrangements.

He would be at the wheel; beside him would sit their "guide," and behind Grace Seaton, with her revolver hidden beneath her cloak—and both men knew that she would not hesitate to shoot if necessary.

The life of Dandy Leigh hung in the balance. . . .

As to Morecombe . . . from the determined way he gripped the steering-wheel and the vicious stab he gave with his foot at the accelerator . . . the giant car seemed to understand its mission, and plunge fearlessly, like a war horse, into the night.

Little wonder, therefore, as we have said, that no signal had reached the conspirators in London during that momentous Saturday: with Griggs, the chief liaison officer of the great crime gang, turned King's evidence and the mind which had conceived the greatest burglary in history, actually taking place in Scotland Yard, fleeing from the task to which it had sent its foolish victims.

But the great battle was not yet won—or, rather, the duel for the last phase was to be fought out practically single-handed between "Sir Thomas Ladman" and Sir Thomas Ladman—with Leigh to the rescue.

CHAPTER XXIX

Ladman ∇. Ladman

IF anything remained in Grace Seaton's mind of that terrible race from London to Southend by car at a pace which was nothing less than tempting providence—for the black fog of the city had here changed into still more terrible white mist—it was the vision of Dandy Leigh.

Whatever thoughts were in Morecombe's mind, there was only one thought in that of his fair companion. She saw no danger, felt no risks ; she only knew she was out to rescue Leigh from the hands of men who would not scruple to murder him.

How long it took she could not tell : it seemed ages. What way they took she could not guess : it all looked like flying through one dense cloud rather than along an arterial road.

She had a dim recollection of the journey's end, then leaving the car, with orders to refill its tanks, at a garage close to the pier, her misgivings as Morecombe, having learnt that the *Iris* had given no signs of life for twenty-four hours, had come to the conclusion that Heathfield had evidently not been able to make the journey so quickly as they had, in spite of the long start. She remembered, too, how, at Griggs's suggestion, they had taken a little launch in the hopes of Morecombe finding more than he ever anticipated of

incriminating evidence on board—for the chauffeur was now showing absolute enthusiasm in his treason to his old comrades.

Then, as they had boarded the apparently deserted yacht, she remembered how secret hands had clutched Morecombe just as he was going below after Griggs, and the terrible shout that had come up from the depths.

It sent a thrill through every fibre of her being—as it came from a voice she knew so well.

“Welcome back, Griggs. Is Chippendale on fire yet? If so, Ladman and his pal must be cinders by now.”

Had there been the faintest hope of her being able to help Morecombe, she would have stayed at his side: but there was not. She heard the sound of his revolver as it went off, and caught his warning “Save yourself.” The very same moment, as by some prearranged signal, she heard the throb of the engines and felt the movement of the yacht. She thought of the launch. It was tethered alongside, and she knew instantly that she would not have an earthly chance of detaching it, much less getting away unseen.

In an instant her mind was made up. The pier was still visible, and, if anything, the fog would help rather than hinder her escape—and in another second she was over the side and into the icy waters, alone save for the guiding hands of providence and her own strong love for the man she would have risked anything in the world to save.

Well, providence had heard her prayers. The yacht had hesitated for a minute . . . a babble of voices had reached her through the mist between the sound of her

splashing arms as she made for the pier. Then there was the growing numbness of her limbs as the battle began to go against her—then oblivion—only to awake an hour or so later with kind nurses' faces looking over her.

Yes, she had been saved from drowning, but her mind was elsewhere as the nurses begged her to lie still and go to sleep.

With a start she suddenly regained full consciousness, as her memory brought back the thought of the terrible knowledge which she had acquired.

Chippendale was to be burnt, and in it, apparently, were Ladman and Dandy Leigh—and even at that moment the fire might be raging through the old beams which would burn like matchwood.

How she prevailed upon her nurses to even listen to her story—how she induced the young doctor, who, as it happened, had met Leigh on one or two occasions, to believe what everybody looked upon as delirium—she could not tell. She only knew she had succeeded eventually upon the condition that he should accompany her.

All these thoughts made up the background of yet another midnight ride along the great arterial road, but this time in the direction of Chippendale ; and it seemed as if she had actually been able to put her very soul into the engine, so fast and furious was the pace.

"Thank heaven!" they sighed. It had been without foundation. The old grey manor looked only a shadow against the mists, along which the glare of their headlights moved like some ghost seeking to get out of prison.

An old servant appeared at the door in answer to a

persistent spell of ringing—fully dressed, strange to say—and he too stumbled in his replies to Grace Seaton's questionings. He had been awakened, as he said, by the smell of fire, and dressed himself—and the moment they entered there could be little doubt but that he was speaking the truth. A smell of burning seemed to pervade the place—dull, pungent fumes hardly visible to the eye, but unmistakable to the nostrils.

With a cry of horror, Grace Seaton rushed upstairs—the smell increasing as she went. That it could not have started long was evident. There was within the sound of crackling woodwork, not the sight of flame ; but not the slightest doubt existed in the young heiress of Chippendale's mind that she was about to witness the fulfilment of Heathfield's threat.

But it was the motive of that threat which now swept through her soul with its terror : Leigh and Ladman were somewhere in the great building.

With great presence of mind, Grace Seaton rushed back to the great lounge, now lit by the light of the blazing roof, Dr. Ryan with her, and tore a couple of antique battle-axes from the walls. Then, with a cry to the doctor to follow, she rushed from the lounge and up the stairs.

Grace was thinking of the possibility of closed doors—and the still greater possibilities of the fine old panelling in which no nail was ever allowed to penetrate—and led the way to the Elizabethan room.

The smoke of the woodwork, in the absence of wind and the presence of the cloak of mist, now began to descend through the passages. She felt it almost suffocating. But together the two kept wielding their axes upon the panels. Nearer and nearer came the

waves of heat, making the place like a furnace—but crash followed crash.

Even Dr. Ryan, who now saw the danger of their being cut off, began to hesitate ; it seemed almost certain that they would be trapped ; but still Grace Seaton persisted. He was even beginning to suggest that the idea itself was inconceivable, so thick were the old panels, when during a pause in their onslaught they distinctly heard an echo.

They listened. It was more than the echo of their own blows upon a hollow surface : it was the reply of the two imprisoned men. And at her next blow the axe crashed through the panel, and then came the answering cry of—Dandy Leigh.

How in the next few minutes Dr. Ryan had managed to make the curtains into a rope and let these down. How the two fainting figures, almost suffocated with the fumes that had somehow penetrated their subterranean dungeon, managed to hold on as they were hoisted to safety ; how even then Grace Seaton was able to keep the flames from overwhelming them as she helped Leigh, still weak, while Dr. Ryan held Sir Thomas Ladman—she could never quite make out.

She only knew that as they reached the hall the whole roof-work of the southern wing crashed through the floors, and that another few seconds and Vernon Heathfield's devilish plan would have succeeded in engulfing her as well as the two victims for which the holocaust had been planned.

Any other woman would have felt a pang at the sight of her magnificent heritage going up in great sheets of flame under such conditions. Not so Grace

Seaton. Her only thought was Dandy Leigh ; while Leigh's was the risk that she had run on his behalf.

It needed no declaration of love on either side : the whole tragedy spoke more eloquently than they could ever have put into words—besides, there was the greater duty.

Ladman was beginning to try and voice their common gratitude as they slipped out on to the lawn ; but Grace Seaton would have none of it.

In as few words as possible she narrated the events that had led to their rescue with such a margin of safety ; and this information, together with that which Dandy Leigh had already conveyed to the Commissioner of Police, made further delay at the spot out of the question.

" I see it all now," said Sir Thomas Ladman. " Quick, let us get back to London as soon as possible. And, Miss Seaton, if your doctor friend would be good enough to drive us——"

" You just bet your life I'll drive you—anywhere you want," was the enthusiastic reply of the young doctor, who was beginning to really enjoy himself. Now he would have something to talk about for months.

The drive from Chippendale to Winmore seemed never-ending to the occupants of the car. Dandy Leigh found himself hugging Grace Seaton to his breast and whispering words of love in her ear, and when she told him how much she loved him he kissed her, in spite of the fact that his Chief was sitting opposite and could see.

The moment they arrived at Sir Thomas Ladman's

house the Commissioner, who had recovered wonderfully, owing no doubt to the drive, sprang from the car and, dragging Leigh after him, opened the front door with his key, and together the two men made a dash for the library.

"Leigh," gasped Ladman, for the dash up the stairs had rather taken his breath away, "the Lord has delivered my enemies into my hands." And he reached out and grasped the telephone.

"Who are you going to telephone to, sir?" asked Leigh.

"To the Secret Squad. The men you have never heard of—whom nobody knows—the invisible guardians of London!"

CHAPTER XXX

The Secret Squad

A MYSTERIOUS racing-car came up the Whitehall entrance, with a mysterious visitor, who explained that he had particular information only for the private ear of Sir Thomas Ladman himself.

Heathfield, who undisguised was a familiar figure to the force as a great benefactor of the police, presented a card with a foreign title upon it, which produced the desired effect, and prepared to follow the constable.

Before doing so, however, he went up to Griggs and whispered in his ear.

"But have you thought that if we spare Gerolstein he will be a menace to us as long as he lives."

"You mean, with the real Sir Thomas Ladman dead—and buried."

"Yes."

"Then somehow or other we must get rid of him. What matter if he continues his impersonation to his death. What a fine alibi a corpse will make!"

Griggs shrugged his shoulders. Necessity knew no law; and the whole logic of the series of crimes which had marked the story of the Chippendale murder mystery had made it a necessity.

"Monsieur de Corinth, this way, please," said the obsequious constable, ushering the prospective murderer into the sacred precincts of Scotland Yard.

As Heathfield entered, he could see everything going on splendidly—under his very eyes the few constables who preferred indulging their curiosity to snatching a few hours' rest—for the fog was gradually lifting, though the night was still black.

Just at the moment, however, when, ushered into the presence of Sir Thomas Ladman—to use that name for the last time it was officially used—Heathfield was about to pick the fatal quarrel, there was a dull sound as of a distant explosion and every light in the building went out.

The sound travelled through the fog-bound city like the roar of thunder.

Almost at the same time there came another roar, followed by another, and yet another, but of a different kind—the open throttle of huge racing-cars which up to a few seconds before must, to judge from the direction in which the sounds emanated, have been slowly crawling along from either end of the Embankment and from Victoria Street and Trafalgar Square.

It was the Secret Squad—marshalled at a few minutes' notice by the genius of Sir Thomas Ladman, and conceived at the time a sudden strike of the guardians of the treasure-house of London would have made possible the coup which now, in spite of the capture of Scotland Yard, was no longer possible.

“Good God! what's that?” exclaimed Gerolstein. But the man to whom he addressed the remark—the great Heathfield—was just as panic-stricken as he was himself.

From the direction of the river they could see the motor-launch making frantic signals of distress. Below in the Yard in the meanwhile came more noise, then a clatter of feet coming up the great staircase.

"We're discovered," said Sir Thomas Ladman. "Everything is lost."

"Keep your head, man," replied Vernon Heathfield—for, coward though he was at heart, he was still English enough in blood to try to face the music to the end.

The same moment Estankraft and Zitinoff rushed into the room.

"Save us—our men are discovered," said the old Professor. "What shall we do?"

"It's impossible to pull off this thing now. Whatever has happened? Why are you here?" added Zitinoff.

"I came to warn you that we have been betrayed," he said, "and that there stands your betrayer," said Heathfield.

It was a weird scene—this deadly feud of the crooks by the eerie light of the electric torches which the Chief had pulled from a drawer in his desk.

Once again race came to the fore: Gerolstein broke away from the perfect English that he spoke and showed the bitter Anglophobe vein in his nature.

If there was a trap—was it not the Englishman who had set it? How were they to know that the whole thing had not been a ruse to get them into the clutch of Scotland Yard—red-handed; but it was all the wild reasoning of a madman.

Just as suddenly as the light had gone out the light came on again—and as it did so Heathfield got a momentary inspiration to divide his enemies.

"If the worst comes to the worst," he said, "better burn the place down, or, quick, some of those invisible gas bombs"—for on the lorry that bore the peaceful emblem of Government service the conspirators had planned for almost any emergency.

Flight, for example, would invite pursuit : one of these bombs would " knock out " any driver bold enough to take one whiff of the deadly stuff.

" No," added Heathfield, correcting himself, " fire the place first. The bomb last, as we make our escape by water."

From a crook's point of view it was a brilliant idea ; the gas cylinders they had brought for burning through the solid steel doors of the great safe would be better than petrol.

Zitinoff and Estankraft, believing themselves to be assured of at least a sporting chance of escape, prepared to put the plan into execution, and in a few seconds smoke was issuing from the finger-print department.

Unfortunately for their plans, Dandy Leigh was now upon the scene ; but the rescuers' task was not to be so easy. The gates on to Whitehall had remained closed, and the crooks, carefully concealed behind points of vantage, kept up a deadly fire upon the open doorways of the Yard, and at every face that appeared at the windows.

For a few moments the two forces seemed well matched, for the crooks, though in the minority, had the advantage of cover—but not for long.

Dandy Leigh noticed that a great fight was being put up at the Whitehall Gate, but there was one thing noticeable about it, it was a defensive fight.

This meant, as he saw in a second, that the enemy obviously were conducting this part of their operations more in the nature of a rear-guard action. In other words, their intention was to escape—if they were to escape at all—by the riverside. Here both

embankments were guarded by bodies of police from other stations, which had come to their rescue—which seemed to prove that they were surrounded; but there was still the river itself.

It was the one point that they had momentarily overlooked, and, peering right down through the vista made by the two gates, Leigh noticed the flash of signals.

In a second he had gone round by the Houses of Parliament and was on the Embankment side—but at that moment a sort of panic seemed to have seized the defenders, as great tongues of flames began to shoot from one of the windows of a basement.

With a sudden crash the gateway was thrust aside, and the next instant some twenty panic-stricken individuals dashed out, half to the right, half to the left.

Leigh looked for the leaders, but they were not with them, and, as he knew the rank and file would be rounded up before they had gone far, he let them pass.

“Quick,” he said, “follow me or it may be too late.” And he led the way past the blazing lorry which contained the famous dossier.

His companion followed him up the main staircase, which was already beginning to be hidden beneath the wreaths of smoke that were ascending from below.

Nobody attacked them as they did so, and Leigh was just wondering whether the heads had escaped him when there came a sound of voices from the room that belonged to the Commissioner of Police.

The voices were familiar—those of the men he had tracked for weeks, step by step, at every stage of the great conspiracy.

It was the voice of Heathfield that was speaking, but in tones more terrible than he had ever heard the

great financier speak before—the voice of deliberate incitement to murder.

“It’s Gerolstein, I tell you, who has betrayed us, not me. I don’t believe he ever intended to play straight with us—he intended to betray us to Ladman all the time.”

There was a crash as the large writing-desk was hurled by the pseudo-Chief upon his attackers, the while Vernon Heathfield looked on at what was evidently going to be butchery.

The next minute Dandy Leigh and his companions burst into the room.

There was sheer devilry in the faces of Estankraft and Zitinoff, and in their despair they flung themselves upon the defenceless man—but Leigh was just in time.

“Hands up—all of you,” said the young detective. “You’ve no chance.”

Leigh saw Vernon Heathfield’s arm swing round to his left pocket, and then try to raise his hand towards his right temple.

With a quick shot and the precision of years, Leigh shattered the financier’s wrist and his weapon dropped harmlessly to the floor.

“Not that way, Mr. Vernon Heathfield—the law wants you for more than this.”

“The Siege of Scotland Yard?” said the financier, with an attempt at pride of achievement in his tone. “But for you it would have been the greatest coup in history.”

“Wrong again,” said Leigh. “For the murder of Mrs. Heathfield, your wife!”

